

# REPUBLICS IN ANCIENT INDIA

c. 1500 B.C.-500 B.C.

BY

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WITH A FOREWORD BY  
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With two Maps



LEIDEN  
E. J. BRILL  
1968

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1968

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*TO*  
*MY GRANDPARENTS FOR ENCOURAGEMENT*  
*MY PARENTS FOR AFFECTION*  
*AND*  
*IN MEMORY OF MY FATHER-IN-LAW*  
*DR. ISIDOR FINE, M.D., OF NEW YORK*



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## FOREWORD

India has long been proud of the republican institutions which existed in various regions of the Subcontinent in early times. These oligarchic or republican communities survived down to the Gupta period, and from time to time played an important part in the politics of northern India. Much has already been written about them, some of it very valuable, but some rather tendentious, prompted by an attempt to make ancient India appear as close to twentieth century ideals as possible.

A dispassionate survey of the all too scanty sources still leaves much for India to be proud of, and the days are past when Indian scholars needed to impress the world with the fact that their country is capable of governing itself democratically, a fact which has been proved more than adequately by the events of the last twenty years. Therefore there has been a real need for a reassessment of the evidence on India's ancient republics as objectively as possible.

Dr. J. P. Sharma has met this need most ably, as far as the Vedic republics and those of the period of the Buddha are concerned. He has surveyed the relevant sources with a minuteness such as has not been applied to them hitherto, and has brought to bear scholarly and critical judgment on the data which they provide. Moreover, he has made many valuable comparisons with similar political institutions in other parts of the ancient and mediaeval world, and thus he has thrown light on many obscure aspects of the subject. Though in the course of his research he has found it necessary to reject some of the views which have in the past prevailed, and to cast doubt on many passages in his sources which have hitherto been accepted as giving authentic data, he has nevertheless greatly deepened our knowledge of the subject. Among positive contributions, he is particularly to be commended for his detailed analysis of the data on the *sabhā* and *samiti* and on the origin of the republican tribes of eastern India.

I believe that this very original study will become a standard work on the subject, and I trust that Dr. Sharma will follow it with a further study of the republican peoples of India in later times.

A. L. BASHAM





## PREFACE

This monograph essentially represents my doctoral thesis in ancient Indian history submitted to the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, in 1962. Since the manuscript was completed and sent to the publisher, several studies have appeared that treat certain aspects of ancient Indian polity—notably those of Professors Y. Mishra, Charles Drekmeier, B. A. Saletore, J. W. Spellman, and U. N. Ghoshal. Since none of these books consider the republican political systems of ancient India in any depth or detail, their publication has not necessitated any significant change in my interpretation of the subject.

Like any other research, my work has also benefited from the labours of earlier scholars. I am greatly indebted to them and they have been duly acknowledged in the footnotes and bibliography. In the course of this work a number of scholars and friends have helped me in many ways. I am especially thankful for the kindness of Professor A. L. Basham who not only supervised and carefully read through this work, but also encouraged and inspired me. I am also grateful to him for writing the Foreword and introducing me to the scholarly community. Professors E. H. Warmington, A. K. Narain, V. S. Pathak, Dr. J. G. de Casparis, and Mr. C. A. Rylands have gladly and willingly given me their valuable suggestions, friendly encouragement, and personal help.

My mother-in-law has also taken a keen interest in this book, as have some of my colleagues and many of my students at the University of Hawaii. It gives me special pleasure to record my appreciation to my wife Miriam, without whose help this work could not have been accomplished.

J. P. SHARMA

New Delhi

26th January, 1968



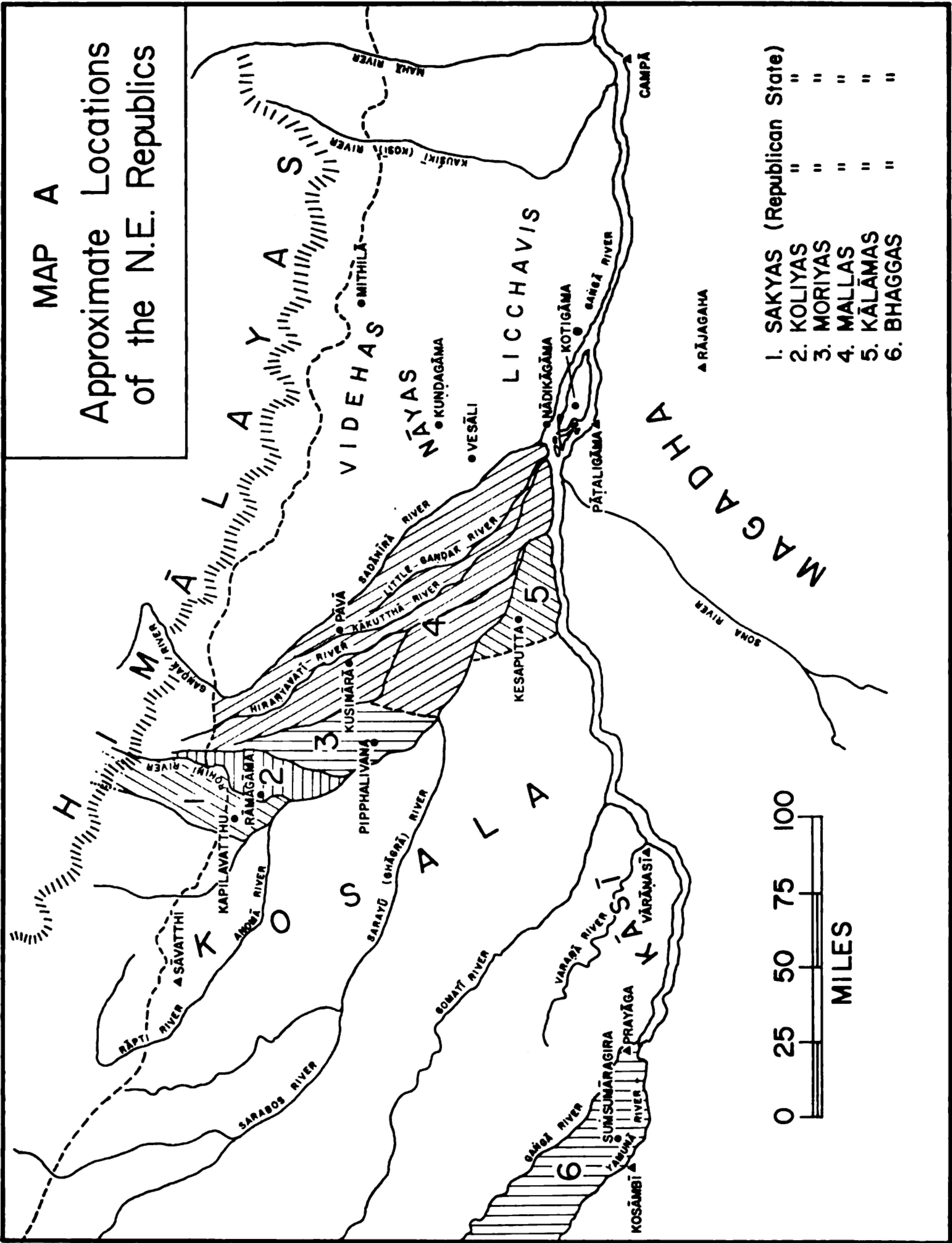
## ABBREVIATIONS

ABORI.	<i>Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona.</i>
<i>Ācār. Sū.</i>	<i>Ācārāṅga Sūtra.</i>
<i>Ait. Br.</i>	<i>Aitareya Brāhmaṇa.</i>
<i>Anguttara.</i>	<i>Anguttara Nikāya.</i>
<i>AV.</i>	<i>Atharva Veda.</i>
<i>BDG.</i>	<i>Bengal District Gazetteer.</i>
<i>Bhav. P.</i>	<i>Bhaviṣyata Purāṇa.</i>
<i>Br. Up.</i>	<i>Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad.</i>
BRWW	<i>Buddhist Records of the Western World.</i>
CAGIM.	Cunningham, <i>Ancient Geography of India</i> , Majumdar Sastri's edn.
<i>Car. Lects.</i>	Bhandarkar, <i>Carmichael Lectures.</i>
<i>Chān. Up.</i>	<i>Chāndogya Upaniṣad.</i>
CHI.	<i>Cambridge History of India.</i>
CII.	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum.</i>
CMH.	<i>Cambridge Mediaeval History.</i>
<i>Dhammapadaṭṭha.</i>	Buddhaghosa, <i>Dhammapadaṭṭhakathā.</i>
<i>Dīgha.</i>	<i>Dīgha Nikāya.</i>
DPPN.	Malalasekera, <i>Dictionary of Pāli Proper Names.</i>
<i>Ep. Ind.</i>	Hultzsch, <i>Epigraphica Indica.</i>
<i>Gitā.</i>	<i>Bhagavadgītā.</i>
HCIP.	R. C. Majumdar, <i>et. al.</i> , <i>History and Culture of Indian People.</i>
HGTB.	M. S. Pandey, <i>Historical Geography and Topography of Bihar.</i>
HOS.	Harvard Oriental Series.
IA.	<i>Indian Antiquary.</i>
IHQ.	<i>Indian Historical Quarterly.</i>
<i>Jaim. Br.</i>	<i>Jaiminiya Brāhmaṇa.</i>
JAOS.	<i>Journal of American Oriental Society.</i>
JASB.	<i>Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal.</i>
<i>Jāt.</i>	<i>Jātaka.</i>
JBORS.	<i>Journal of Bihar and Orissa Research Society.</i>
JBRS.	<i>Journal of Bihar Research Society.</i>
JIH.	<i>Journal of Indian History.</i>
JPTS.	<i>Journal of the Pāli Text Society.</i>
JRAS.	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society.</i>
<i>Kāth. Sam.</i>	<i>Kāthaka Saṃhitā.</i>
<i>Kauśī. Ar.</i>	<i>Kauśītaki Āraṇyaka.</i>
<i>Kauśī. Br.</i>	<i>Kauśītaki Brāhmaṇa.</i>
<i>Kauśī. Up.</i>	<i>Kauśītaki Upaniṣad.</i>
KCBI.	Law, <i>Kṣatriya Clans in Buddhist India.</i>
<i>Lalita.</i>	<i>Lalitavistara.</i>
<i>Mait. Sam.</i>	<i>Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitā.</i>
<i>Majjhima.</i>	<i>Majjhima Nikāya.</i>
<i>Mbh.</i>	<i>Mahābhārata.</i>
MPS.	Waldschmidt, <i>Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra.</i>



OS Texts.	Muir, <i>Original Sanskrit Texts.</i>
<i>Pañcav. Br.</i>	<i>Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa.</i>
<i>Pap. Sūd.</i>	Buddhaghosa, <i>Papañca-Sūdanī.</i>
<i>Par. Dīp.</i>	Dhammapāla, <i>Paramattha-Dīpanī.</i>
<i>Par. Jot.</i>	Buddhaghosa, <i>Paramattha-Jotikā.</i>
PHAI.	Raychaudhuri, <i>Political History of Ancient India.</i>
PTS.	Pāli Text Society.
<i>Pur.</i>	<i>Purāṇa.</i>
<i>ṚV.</i>	<i>Ṛg Veda.</i>
<i>Sam. Pās.</i>	Buddhaghosa, <i>Samanta-Pāsādikā.</i>
<i>Samyutta.</i>	<i>Samyutta Nikāya.</i>
<i>Śāṅkh. Śt. Sūtra.</i>	<i>Śāṅkhāyana Śrauta Sūtra.</i>
<i>Sārattha.</i>	Buddhaghosa, <i>Sāratthappakāsinī.</i>
<i>Sat. Br.</i>	<i>Satapatha Brāhmaṇa.</i>
SBB.	Sacred Books of Buddhists.
SBE.	Sacred Books of the East.
SBH.	Sacred Books of Hindus.
SKTAI.	Law, <i>Some Kṣatriya Tribes in Ancient India.</i>
<i>Sū. Kṛtā.</i>	<i>Sūtra Kṛtāṅga.</i>
<i>Sum. Vil.</i>	<i>Sumaṅgala-Vilāsinī</i> of Buddhaghosa.
<i>Sutta.</i>	<i>Sutta Nipāta.</i>
TAI.	Law, <i>Tribes in Ancient India.</i>
<i>Tait. Ār.</i>	<i>Taittirīya Āraṇyaka.</i>
<i>Tait. Br.</i>	<i>Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa.</i>
<i>Tait. Saṁ.</i>	<i>Taittirīya Saṁhitā.</i>
<i>Tib. Lebens.</i>	Schiefner, <i>Eine Tibetanische Lebensbeschreibung.</i>
TOS.	Trübner's Oriental Series.
<i>Uttarā. Sū.</i>	<i>Uttarādhyaṇa Sūtra.</i>
<i>Uvāsag.</i>	<i>Uvāsagadasāo.</i>
<i>Vāj. Saṁ.</i>	<i>Vājasaneyī Saṁhitā.</i>
<i>Vaṁsattha.</i>	<i>Vaṁsatthappakāsinī.</i>
<i>Vinaya.</i>	<i>Vinaya Piṭaka.</i>
VVRI.	Viśveśvarānanda Vedic Research Institute.







## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### *Previous Works and Our Treatment of the Sources*

The detailed study of republican institutions in ancient India has attracted only a few scholars since Rhys Davids. Sixty-five years ago, he first brought to the notice of students the existence of nine republican clans <sup>1</sup> attested to in the Buddhist literature. Before the publication of *Buddhist India*, little was known of the republics even during the Buddhist period. Thus, Professor Rhys Davids can aptly be acclaimed the pioneer in this field. However, the conclusions stated in his often-quoted monograph give only a bird's-eye-view of these republics.<sup>2</sup> The Sakyas receive comparatively lengthier treatment because, in his opinion, "more details are given, very naturally, of the Sākiya clan than of the others."<sup>3</sup> Thirty-two years later Rhys Davids restated his position briefly in the *Cambridge History of India* <sup>4</sup> with slight improvement.

Rhys Davids' work is of great value, but it contains a number of fundamental errors, notably his claim that "the Vajjians included eight Confederate clans," <sup>5</sup> and his indiscriminate use of the terms Vajji and Licchavi. Moreover his only sources were the Buddhist texts and he took no account of the Jaina literature, on the basis of which the new name of the Nāyas of Kuṇḍapura <sup>6</sup> can be added to the list of republican states that flourished at the time of the Buddha and Mahāvira.

Rhys Davids said very little about the republican institutions ~~even of those clans which he treated. At best his work can be adjudged merely as an introduction to these ancient republics. As a pioneer of Pāli studies he had not as much material at his disposal as had the later students of the subject.~~

<sup>1</sup> T. W. Rhys Davids, *Buddhist India*, p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17-41.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>4</sup> *CHI*, i, pp. 174-8.

<sup>5</sup> *Buddhist India*, p. 25; cf. below, chap. iii.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. below, chap. vi.

Dr. K. P. Jayaswal subsequently treated this theme in an article entitled, "An Introduction to Hindu Polity,"<sup>1</sup> which he subsequently expanded into his famous book, *Hindu Polity*.<sup>2</sup> This work covers a period of about 2,000 years and mentions as many as 82 republics.<sup>3</sup> However, Jayaswal's *Hindu Polity* is tendentious, for it was written at a crucial period of Indian nationalism to prove that India was ready for independence. It is rather a counsel for the defense than a fair assessment of the evidence.

The next work on the subject was a lecture delivered by Professor D. R. Bhandarkar which added little new and made several mistakes.<sup>4</sup> Professor R. C. Majumdar corrected Bhandarkar regarding the Sakyan form of government, but committed some serious errors himself.<sup>5</sup> In some respects Majumdar was even more adventurous than Jayaswal, but his work is an improvement on that of Bhandarkar.

Professor A. S. Altekar's book gives a fuller and less biased account of the republics,<sup>6</sup> and his treatment of the subject appears to be the best amongst Indian historians. Dr. B. C. Law also took up the study of the tribes in ancient India,<sup>7</sup> but his accounts are of a general nature and they have little that is new or significant to add pertaining to the political institutions of the republican states. The next contribution to the study of republics was a Hindi booklet by Bhagiratha Dube Gautama;<sup>8</sup> this work is of such a low academic standard that it deserves no detailed criticism.<sup>9</sup>

Recently, Professor C. V. R. Rao published an article on the "Ancient Indian Republics,"<sup>10</sup> in which he mainly summarizes

<sup>1</sup> *Modern Review*, 1913, pp. 535-41 and 664-8.

<sup>2</sup> (First edn.), pt. i, pp. 3-179; *cp.* V.S. Agrawala, *India as Known to Pāṇini*, chap. vii.

<sup>3</sup> *Hindu Polity*, (3rd edn.), Appx. B, pp. 361ff.

<sup>4</sup> *Carmichael Lectures*, pp. 140ff.

<sup>5</sup> *Corporate Life in Ancient India*, pp. 97ff.

<sup>6</sup> *State and Government in Ancient India*, chap. vi, pp. 109ff.

<sup>7</sup> *Kṣatriya Clans in Buddhist India; Some Kṣatriya Tribes in Ancient India; Tribes in Ancient India*.

<sup>8</sup> *Bhārata ke prācīna gaṇarājya*.

<sup>9</sup> A sample statement will suffice to show Gautama's approach to the subject. "...there were republican states in early India also, in which administration was carried out for the public-good, by the people themselves. That government was not based on fear or punishment, but on love. Its authority was on the hearts [of the people] and not on [their] body, wealth and land. . ." (*ibid.*, p. 2).

<sup>10</sup> *Modern Review*, Oct., 1959, 106, pp. 273-86.



the research of earlier scholars but shows none of the weaknesses of those who wrote in the wave of enthusiastic nationalism. Professor Rao does not make any original point and believes in Jayaswal's dictum that the republics "definitely came into existence in the post-Vedic period."

The most recent book which purports to describe the political ideas and institutions of both ancient India and Greece comes from the pen of Professor Krishna Prasanna Mukerji.<sup>1</sup> This work was written with the purpose of showing that the political institutions of the ancient Hindus, if not superior, were definitely as good as those of the Greeks.<sup>2</sup> Professor Mukerji also touches on the "democracies" and republican states but adds little new and mainly follows the earlier nationalist historians. Mukerji usually under-values the importance of the Greek political philosophers and the Greek achievements in republican institutions.<sup>3</sup>

None of these works has even hinted <sup>4</sup> that there existed different forms of aristocratic government or quasi-republican "political communities" in Vedic India besides the generally acknowledged monarchies. We have found evidence for the existence of such institutions in Vedic India not so much by the discovery of new sources as by a new approach and more systematic handling and careful analysis of the *Vedas*. The same method enables us to throw new light on the relationship between the *sabhā* and the *samiti*. It reveals that in a special variety of the Vedic aristocracies—where both these institutions existed side by side—the former was a comparatively small council chiefly composed of the most influential members of the community, whereas the latter was a bigger assembly consisting of the heads of families of the tribe.<sup>5</sup>

In the chapter on "Non-Monarchical Governments in Vedic India" we have also examined the controversial question of the *vidatha*, which recently has been made much of by Professor R. S.

<sup>1</sup> *Ancient Political Experiences*, pp. 18-28, 85-91.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1-6.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. A. H. M. Jones, *Athenian Democracy*, chap. iii, iv; J. A. O. Larsen, *Representative Government in Greek and Roman History*, pp. 1-46.

<sup>4</sup> Except that of R. C. Majumdar who states that, "although some passages in the Vedic literature seem to imply the existence of oligarchic or republican clans, we cannot come to any definite conclusion on this point" (*History and Culture of the Indian People*, ii, pp. 330-1).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. below, chap. ii.

*Thesis*



Sharma. We have endeavoured to show that the *vidatha* had no political connotation at all and that it was not a political institution even on a local basis.<sup>1</sup>

In this monograph we have further attempted, by an examination of the better-known sources and by the use of material derived from sources hitherto untapped in this connection, to provide a more detailed and thorough study of the republican institutions of the Vedic aristocracies. We have included our findings on the name and etymology, origin and location, government and organization, judicial procedure, foreign relations and political history of each republican state that flourished at the time of the Buddha and Mahāvira.

While we may claim to have added something to the works of Rhys Davids, Jayaswal, Majumdar, Altekar, and the other authorities, the account presented here, based mainly on the passing references in the Vedic, Buddhist and Jaina sacred literature, is of necessity fragmentary and not always definite. This is mainly due to the nature of the sources which were composed by the adherents of different religious sects, and are biased in favour of their own creeds and followers. This must have led to exaggerations and perhaps to deliberately false statements. An Indologist, whether writing on religion or philosophy, sociology or history, is sometimes faced with contradictions in the sources themselves. This being the case, ~~we have frequently been compelled to state the conclusions~~ in provisional or hypothetical terms. Although in this and in other respects our picture of the rise, development, organization, administration and decline of the republics is still lamentably defective, we trust that our work will serve to clarify some points and to act as a catalyst for further research on this most significant aspect of early Indian polity.

The main evidence for the early Vedic aristocracies comes from the *R̥g Veda*, the *Atharva Veda* and some of the *Brāhmaṇas* and *Upaniṣads*. However, the *Yajur* and *Sāma Vedas* and the majority of the *Brāhmaṇas* reveal very little about the subject. Most of the data utilized in this work has been exploited by other scholars, but the approach to the Vedic sources presented here gives an entirely different picture of the political scene. The material which alludes to "elective monarchy," *sabhā* and *samiti*, has been thoroughly

<sup>1</sup> J. P. Sharma, *JRAS* (April), 1965, pp. 43-56; below, pp. 62ff.



examined, and the existence and interrelationship of these political institutions is discussed. It seems most likely that the occurrence of one institution in certain *maṇḍalas* and hymns of the *R̥g Veda* and the absence of the other point to their relative age and origin. For example, the frequent mention of the *viś* in connection with the election of the king and the absence of mention of the *samiti* in this context indicates that the king was elected by the *viś*, or heads of the political community, and that the *samiti* had nothing to do with it, as was strongly advocated by Dr. K. P. Jayaswal.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the occurrence of the *samiti* in the later *maṇḍalas* of the *R̥g* and *Atharva Vedas*, and the fewer mentions of the *viś* in the same texts, suggest that the *samiti* was of comparatively later origin. Possibly it developed from the archaic *viś* body and crystallized into a distinct popular political institution during the period when the later *maṇḍalas* of the *R̥g* and *Atharva Vedas* were composed.<sup>2</sup>

This analytic and unorthodox approach to the interpretation of the Vedic data gives an altogether different result which is probably more convincing and satisfactory than that which has been achieved heretofore. Similarly, investigations into the *Brāhmaṇas* and *Upaniṣads* reveal that during the period of their composition monarchy had become virtually the universal form of government. The aristocratic or quasi-republican types of government were extinct or at least did not flourish in the Kurukṣetra region where the bulk of Brāhmaṇic literature was composed. It is not unlikely that some of the early Vedic aristocracies had become monarchies while others moved eastward in order to retain their individual freedom and principles of popular government.

The main evidence for the northeastern republics of the post-Vedic period (c. 600-480 B.C.) is provided by the Pāli canon of the southern Buddhists, Sanskrit Buddhist texts, the sacred literature of the Jainas, the *Mahābhārata*, and secular treatises like the *Arthaśāstra* of Kauṭilya and the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* of Pāṇini. A few archaeological reports, some inscriptions, and seals also assist in explaining the workings of their constitutions.

For the Vedic peoples, the sacrifice was the pivot around which the entire world revolved. They had no sense of history.<sup>3</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> Cf. below, pp. 15ff.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. below, pp. 42ff.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Pargiter, *JRAS*, 1913, p. 904.



Buddhists and Jainas were so busy propagating their own doctrines and condemning those of their opponents that they had little time or thought for writing histories of states or biographies of politicians. In India no political biography is known to have appeared before the reign of Harṣavardhana in the 7th century A.D., and before Kalhaṇa's *Rājatarāṅgiṇī* India had nothing to match Thucydides or Xenophon, Herodotus or Livy, Cicero or Plutarch. Indians of today feel pride in the ṛṣi-composers of the Vedic hymns and the Upaniṣadic philosophers, and in historical figures like the Buddha and Aśoka. (But the fact remains that at least until the mediaeval period their ideas of historical writing were in the main unscientific. This judgement, of course, is not wholly true of Ceylon, where the Buddhist tradition preserved a stronger historical sense.)

[Thus, the chief evidence for even the republics of the post-Vedic period must be obtained from religious texts.] The Pāli canon records numerous contemporary events other than those connected with the Buddha. There are many descriptions of political and social events, such as the war between the Vajjis and Ajātasattu, including the intrigues of his minister Vassakāra, the fortifying of Pāṭaligāma for defensive purposes, and finally, the subjugation of the Vajjis. These are some of the important historical events recorded in the Pāli texts. In connection with the historical references in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, Dr. A. K. Warder aptly observes that "the records are circumstantial and realistic and purport to be eye-witness accounts of the events. It seems, we must accept the conclusion that some such eye-witness reports, at least, formed the model for this apparently unique style of literature, though we know that later on forgeries in the same style were produced in order to give currency to new doctrines." <sup>1</sup>

The Buddhists seem to have had a better historical sense than the Hindus and their attitude to contemporary events is on the whole fairly balanced.<sup>2</sup> They are also far more reliable and enlightening than the Jainas regarding their geographical details of the eastern peoples. This is evident from the account of the last journey of the Buddha from Pāṭaligāma to Kusinārā, recorded in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*. The text has preserved significant details pertaining to the northern boundary of the Magadhan kingdom,

<sup>1</sup> C. H. Philips, ed., *Historians of India, Pakistan and Ceylon*, p. 47.

<sup>2</sup> Philips, *op. cit.*, pp. 46ff; Pargiter, *op. cit.*, p. 904.



the position of the Vajjian land, the names of the states travelled over, and their boundaries. The Jaina texts, on the contrary, contain jumbled and confused geographical data even about the Nāyas, the clan of Mahāvira, and their chief town Kuṇḍapura. Moreover, they throw no light on the geographical position of their republican territories.

While in general the accounts of the Sanskrit Buddhist literature are more elaborate and embroidered than that of the Pāli versions, they occasionally do preserve traditions more accurately than the Pāli<sup>1</sup> or provide data not to be found in the latter texts.<sup>2</sup>

The Jaina Prākṛit sources naturally give more details about the republic from which the apostle of their faith hailed—the Nāyas. They also give invaluable information pertaining to the Vajji-Magadhan war, the names and number of republics constituting the Vajjian Confederacy, etc. However, on the whole, they are less reliable and informative than the Buddhist texts regarding the geography of the republican region.

The later *Jātakas* and the commentaries of Buddhaghosa also contain some useful information about the republican peoples. The *Jātakas* inform us of the number of the Licchavian assembly, the diplomatic relations between the Sakyas, Kosalans, Koliyas, Mallas and Licchavis, and some important historical events like the Sakya-Kosala and Sakya-Koliya wars. Buddhaghosa's voluminous commentaries on the *Tripitaka* give interesting, and at times also valuable, details about the name of the Licchavis and the Moriyas, the ethnic relationship of the latter with the Mauryan dynasty, and significant details about the causes of war between the Vajjian Confederacy and the Magadhan monarch.

⌈ Apart from those indigeneous sources, we have also examined the evidence provided by other republican peoples of the ancient world, such as the Greeks, Romans, Germans and Icelanders, and in the course of this work have drawn parallels and contrasts between Indian republican institutions and those which prevailed elsewhere. ⌋ We have also endeavoured to explain certain features of ancient Indian republican institutions with the aid of anthropological studies of chieftainless tribes, where such studies have proved valuable for the subject. These two factors, we believe, have helped

<sup>1</sup> Cf. below, pp. 171ff.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. below, Appx. E, pp. 248-9.



us much to understand the administration and organization of early Indian republics.)

All the relevant data has been handled and interpreted with as much objectivity and dispassion as possible. We have been constantly aware of the limitations of this work and have firmly kept to the subject. When other topics such as the questions of name, etymology, origin, etc., are discussed, it is because they provide the necessary historical context within which lies the proper appreciation and correct understanding of these republican institutions.

The more important passages from the sources have been translated or paraphrased in the course of our work. We have included the romanized originals of relevant *pādas*, passages or phrases in the footnotes, whether in Sanskrit, Pāli or Prākṛit. The system followed in the transliteration for the Sanskrit passages is orthodox. The romanization of Pāli passages is that of the Pāli Text Society, except for the sign ṇ used for *anusvāra* in the Pāli texts, which has been regularly replaced by m. In all transliterations, *anusvāra*, when occurring within the word before any of the *sparsa* consonants, has usually been expressed by the appropriate nasal letter. Any irregularity found in this system is unintentional.

### *The Interpretation and Definition of the Term Gaṇa*

While the early Vedic texts support the existence of different kinds of non-monarchical governments, they fail to register the technical term by which these republican or quasi-republican political communities could be described constitutionally. The word *gaṇa*, which denoted a republic in the post-Vedic period, occurs for the first time in the Vedic texts,<sup>1</sup> chiefly in association with the Maruts and Ādityas, and has been interpreted as a "technical word for the republic" by Professor R. S. Sharma.<sup>2</sup> In most of the cases the *gaṇas* of the Maruts and Ādityas are connected with war and the spoils obtained by fighting were distributed equally among those who formed the *gaṇa*.<sup>3</sup> Most authorities derive the word from the root *gaṇ*, meaning "to count" or "to reckon," and explain

<sup>1</sup> *RV*, i, 14,3; 64,12; ii, 23,1; iii, 32,2; iv, 35,3; 50,5; v, 52, 13-4; 53,10; 56,1; 58, 1,2; vi, 16,24; vii, 9,5; 58,1; viii, 94,12; ix, 96,17; x, 36,7; 77,1; *AV*, iv, 13,4; xiii, 4,8; xix, 13,4, xx, 88,5, etc.

<sup>2</sup> *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India*, p. 81; cf. pp. 81-93.

<sup>3</sup> *RV*, v, 79,5; x, 34,12; *AV*, iii, 30, 5-6, etc.



that the noun *gaṇa* literally means "a flock" or a "troop."<sup>1</sup> Keeping in view the connection of the Vedic *gaṇa* with war and spoils in the Vedic texts, it may appropriately be rendered as "troop" or "multitude," and the interpretation of "republic" is not warranted.<sup>2</sup> If the *gaṇa* had the technical sense of a republican state, it would be expected to occur in association with the four forms of non-monarchical government which we discuss a little later. As in the *R̥g Veda* the word has no implicit or explicit sense of a type of government, and as it does not figure in association with different types of aristocracies, we differ from Professor Sharma's interpretation.

The terms *gaṇa* and *saṅgha*, with reference to the republican form of government, do not occur until after the 6th century B.C.<sup>3</sup> They then appear for the first time in the *Ācārāṅga Sūtra*,<sup>4</sup> *Avadāna Śataka*,<sup>5</sup> *Mahāvagga*,<sup>6</sup> *Aṣṭādhyāyī*,<sup>7</sup> *Arthaśāstra*,<sup>8</sup> etc., and in the last 65 years several Indologists have endeavoured to bring out the constitutional significance of these terms. Professor Rhys Davids defines them as "republics with either complete or modified independence,"<sup>9</sup> but while discussing the Sakyas, the Vajjians, the Mallas, etc., he refers to them merely as "clans."<sup>10</sup> Even more surprising is the absence of the terms *gaṇa* and *saṅgha* from his monumental work on the Buddhist period.

In the years 1914-16 a great controversy raged about the term *gaṇa*, which J. F. Fleet translated merely as "tribe."<sup>11</sup> F. W. Thomas, supporting Jayaswal, interpreted it as meaning a "republican or oligarchic constitution."<sup>12</sup> He explained the *gaṇa* as "a

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Monier Williams, *Skt.-Eng. Dic.*, s.v. *gaṇa*, flock, troop or multitude; Böhtlinck and Roth, *Skt. Wörterb.*, s.v. *gaṇa*, *Schaar*, *Reide*; V.S. Apte, *Skt.-Eng. Dic.*, s.v.; M. Mayrhofer, *Ety. Skt. Dic.*, s.v. *gaṇaḥ*, *Schar*, *Reide*, *Menge*.

<sup>2</sup> Prof. Sharma himself derives the word from *gaṇ*, but he further argues that "although literally the term *gaṇa* does not mean a tribe but an artificial collection of people not necessarily belonging to the same tribe, it appears that in most cases in the Vedic literature this term is used in the sense of a tribal organization" (*op. cit.*, p. 82).

<sup>3</sup> U. N. Ghoshal, *History of Indian Political Ideas*, p. 76.

<sup>4</sup> *Ācār. Sū.*, i, 3, 160.

<sup>5</sup> *Avadāna*, 88, ii, p. 103.

<sup>6</sup> *Mahāvagga*, ix, 4.

<sup>7</sup> Pāṇini, iii, 3, 36, 42, 86; v, 3, 114; cf. V. S. Agrawala, *op. cit.*, chap. vii.

<sup>8</sup> Kautilya, bk. xi, pp. 376ff.

<sup>9</sup> Rhys Davids, *Buddhist India*, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17ff.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Fleet, *JRAS*, 1914, pp. 745-7; 1915, pp. 138-40, 802-4; *cp.* 1913, pp. 995-8.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas, *JRAS*, 1914, p. 413.



sort of council representing the powerful families in the state.”<sup>1</sup> Since then most scholars have accepted the fact that in the post-Vedic period the term denoted, beyond all doubt, a republican form of government. However, according to Professor R. C. Majumdar, the *gaṇas* “denoted, in general, merely corporations of particular kinds.”<sup>2</sup> Majumdar is correct to a large extent, but his definition is vague and one does not get from it a clear idea as to precisely what the *gaṇa* meant in early constitutional terminology.

Dr. K. P. Jayaswal, on the authority of Pāṇini and the *Majjhima Nikāya* held the view that “*saṅgha* and also *gaṇa* synonymously signified, par excellence, the republics. The republics were the *saṅghas* and *gaṇas* at the same time.”<sup>3</sup> He further states that “the term *gaṇa* signified the form of government. *Saṅgha* on the other hand, signified the state.”<sup>4</sup> It may be that *gaṇa* and *saṅgha* were used synonymously in the sources,<sup>5</sup> but we find no evidence to support the inference that they “signified, par excellence, the republics.” Secondly, Jayaswal is not on very firm ground when he tries to prove that the *gaṇa* and *saṅgha* were distinctly used, the former signifying the “form of government”, and the latter “the state.” The Pāṇinian *sūtra*, commented upon by the Bhāṣyakāra<sup>6</sup> and given as Jayaswal’s authority to produce the difference between *saṅgha* and *gaṇa*, refers to the numerical strength of the former, which Patañjali explains as consisting of “five, ten or twenty members.”<sup>7</sup> These members, says Dr. V. S. Agrawala, refer to the executive of the *saṅgha*.<sup>8</sup> However, the term *gaṇa* occurs neither in this *sūtra* of *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, nor in the commentary on it.<sup>9</sup> Hence, it would be wrong to take Patañjali’s commentary as evidence to support the distinction between the *gaṇa* and *saṅgha*, when the former is not even mentioned in the text.

Professor A. S. Altekar asserted that the “*gaṇa* had a definite constitutional meaning and denoted a form of government, where the power was vested not in one person, but in a *gaṇa* or group of

<sup>1</sup> *JRAS*, 1914, p. 1012; cf. pp. 1010-13; 1915, pp. 533-5; 1916, pp. 162-6.

<sup>2</sup> R. C. Majumdar, *Corporate Life*, p. 138.

<sup>3</sup> Jayaswal, *Hindu Polity*, p. 28.

<sup>4</sup> *Loc. cit.* Pāṇini, iii, 3, 76.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *MPS*, pp. 112ff; *Majjhima*, i, p. 231; Pāṇini, iii, 3, 76.

<sup>6</sup> Patañjali on Pāṇini, v, 1, 59.

<sup>7</sup> *Loc. cit.*, *pañcakaḥ saṅghaḥ daśakaḥ saṅghaḥ*, etc.

<sup>8</sup> V. S. Agrawala, *op. cit.*, p. 431.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Pathak and Chitrao, *Mahābhāṣyaśabdakośaḥ*, s.v. *gaṇa*.



people. *Saṅgha* was another term used precisely in the same sense, because it was sharply distinguished from monarchy.”<sup>1</sup> Although a great improvement on earlier attempts, this definition is still vague and, quite like the previous ones, is not definite in bringing out the full constitutional significance of the terms *gaṇa* and *saṅgha*.

Professor K. P. Mukerji argued that “the Indian *gaṇarājyas* were republics in no worse sense than that in which the much vaunted democracies of Greece were republics, because in both sovereign power was vested in a large central assembly.”<sup>2</sup> Professor Mukerji’s remark is too superficial and tends to underestimate the marvelous achievements of the Greeks in democracy.<sup>3</sup>

It is a serious mistake on the part of the student of ancient political institutions to interpret ancient terms, concepts, and institutions in a modern context. } Jayaswal, Bhandarkar, Majumdar, and to some extent Altekar as well, have been guilty of imposing twentieth-century democratic ideas and institutions on early Indian polity. They seem to start with a purpose which was, no doubt, a natural reaction to the criticism of the nineteenth-century imperialist writers who underrated Indian achievements and various aspects of her past culture, as well as being based on the presupposition that if Greece and Rome had democratic institutions ancient India should have had them also.

The bulk of historical literature produced with this attitude in mind may be justifiable in the context of the times, but only if one accepts academic historical research as a tool for fostering patriotism and igniting revolutions in order to achieve national independence. However, an unbiased and methodical historical monograph of true scholarship cannot be produced with the purpose of proving that India has always been tyrannically ruled by “oriental despots”, and therefore still deserves to be governed by a superior power; neither can it be written to extol an almost perfect form of democracy that Āryavarta knew centuries ago when Britons were still living in caves, and thus prove that India is worthy of self-government. This feeling of patriotism has influenced almost all Indian historians writing on ancient Indian republican institutions

<sup>1</sup> Altekar, *State and Government*, pp. 109-10.

<sup>2</sup> Mukerji, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> Cp. Jones, *op. cit.* pp. 41-72, 99-133; A. Zimmern, *The Greek Commonwealth*, pp. 139ff; T. R. Glover, *Democracy in the Ancient World*, pp. 49ff.



to the extent that it has prevented them from appreciating the democratic and oligarchic experiments carried out in Greece and Rome. To this school of Indian historians the Athenian and Roman democracies were of the same type, whereas the study of any textbook would show that there was a world of difference between the two.<sup>1</sup> Athens in the 5th century had the most refined form of democracy possible in ancient times,<sup>2</sup> and Rome knew no true democracy, at best it had an oligarchy.<sup>3</sup>

The works of nationalist historians contain constitutional terms like parliament, bicameral legislature, popular democracy, proportional representation, executive, cabinet, popular assembly, prime minister, portfolios, chancellor of the exchequer, etc.<sup>4</sup> These are a few of the inaccurate and annoying terms frequently employed by noted historians to describe the political institutions of the "Hindu period." Our investigations suggest that none of these terms can be applicable even to the most successful experiments of democracy carried out in Athens,<sup>5</sup> far less to the Indian, Roman or German republics.

Keeping these points in view, and depending entirely on the early literary, inscriptional and numismatic evidence, our observations lead us to suggest that the *gana* or the *saṅgha* was a republican or quasi-republican form of government in which the supreme power of the state was vested in a considerable portion of the population so qualified only on account of their birth, property or merit.<sup>6</sup> The supreme power was exercised by a few of these *rājās*, elected from amongst themselves and more or less responsible to the qualified body, who deliberated and took, in consultation with the latter, decisions that were binding on the entire population within their territory. The rulers derived their power, not from an individual,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Larsen, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-46; L. Whibley, *Greek Oligarchies*, pp. 83ff; Glover, *op. cit.*

<sup>2</sup> Glover, *op. cit.*, chap. iii, "The Age of Pericles", pp. 49ff.

<sup>3</sup> Larsen, *op. cit.*, p. 4. "In Rome ...democracy had much less chance because the votes were always taken by voting units and this made it possible to favour certain elements in the population. Thus, propertied classes were favoured in the Comitia Centuriata." Cf. T. M. Taylor, *A Constitutional and Political History of Rome*, p. 229.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Jayaswal, *Hindu Polity*, pp. 72ff; Bhandarkar, *Car. Lects.*, pp. 151ff; Altekar, *State and Government*, pp. 134ff, 377ff; K. P. Mukerji, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-28.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Zimmern, *op. cit.*, pp. 160ff.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Taylor, *op. cit.*, pp. 41ff.



human or divine, above them, but from the qualified multitude, below. In short, it was a "government by discussion."<sup>1</sup>

Our analysis of the Vedic texts reveals that there were at least four different forms of "government by discussion" in the early Vedic period (c. 1500 to c. 1000 B.C.).<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, the evidence of the Buddhist and Jaina texts, Pāṇini's *Aṣṭādhyāyī* and Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra*, combine to attest to the existence of a number of republican states<sup>3</sup> (from c. 600 to c. 480 B.C.).<sup>4</sup> The classical historians record yet a larger number of republics and aristocracies which Alexander faced in various parts of north-western India, Panjab and Sind during the latter half of the 4th century B.C.,<sup>5</sup> while the *Mahābhārata*, and certain coins<sup>6</sup> and inscriptions prove that republics flourished in western India even later. The mention of some republican ethnic groups in the Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudra Gupta<sup>7</sup> appears to show that these republics had somehow managed to retain their system of government even during the reign of the mightiest Gupta conqueror, just as in Greece republicanism and federal government outlived Alexander the Great.<sup>8</sup>

(Thus, the inscriptions and numismatic data suggest that it was not at the hands of the powerful Indian kings like Rūdradāman and Samudra Gupta that the western republics suffered their fatal blow, but rather that it was partly because of some inherent weakness of Indian republicanism,<sup>9</sup> and partly due to foreign rulers like Toramāṇa and Mihirakula.<sup>10</sup>)

Ideally, all these republics should have been treated in one volume and we started our research with this in mind. But there is enough to be said about these republics to fill two books of reasonable size. Therefore, (we have confined ourselves to the

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Larsen, *op. cit.*, pp. 5ff.

<sup>2</sup> See below, pp. 15ff; cp. G. Landtman, *Origin of the Inequality of the Social Classes*, pp. 309-16.

<sup>3</sup> Cp. C. V. R. Rao, *Modern Review*, Oct. 1959, 106, pp. 276-86.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. A. L. Basham, *History and Doctrines of the Ājīvikas*, pp. 67-105.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. J. W. McCrindle, *Ancient India, Its Invasion by Alexander the Great*.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. J. Allan, *Catalogue of the Coins of Ancient India*; V. A. Smith, *Catalogue of Coins in the British Museum*, i.

<sup>7</sup> Fleet, *CII*, iii, p. 8, line 22, *Mālava-Ārjunāyana-Yaudheya, Mādraka-Ābhīras-Prārjuna-Sanakānīka-Kāka-Kharaparika-ādibhiścha*. . .

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Larsen, *op. cit.*, pp. 158ff.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. below, Conclusion, pp. 237ff.

<sup>10</sup> For details of these two kings, cf. Fleet, *CII*, iii, Introduction, pp. 10-12.

✓ governments by discussion in the early Vedic and the Buddhist periods alone.) The subject matter of our study, then is: the problems connected with the constitutional development of Vedic institutions, the question whether or not the Vedic monarchy was elective, the manner in which the Vedic aristocracies were organized, the relationship between the Vedic and the northeastern republics, the controversial issue whether or not the *vidatha* was the earliest folk-assembly of the Indo-Aryans, the method by which the northeastern republics were administered, the constant struggle that went on between the republicanists and the monarchists, what wrought the fall of the republics, and some other allied topics of historical importance.



## CHAPTER TWO

### NON-MONARCHICAL GOVERNMENTS IN VEDIC INDIA

Though monarchy was the usual form of government in Vedic India, there can be no doubt that there were some non-monarchical or aristocratic governments as well. A persistent and false tendency is noticeable in the attention which Jayaswal,<sup>1</sup> Majumdar,<sup>2</sup> Altekar,<sup>3</sup> Shama Sastri<sup>4</sup> and others<sup>5</sup> have given to the *sabhā*, the *samiti* and the role that the people, or rather the heads of the families, played in "electing" one of their fellow men to the kingship or chieftaincy of the tribe.<sup>6</sup>

However, a careful study of the Vedic texts not only attests to the existence of republican elements in the Vedic polity, but also points to the significant fact, hitherto unnoticed, that these institutions, existing in some case individually and in others jointly, indicated special forms of non-monarchical or aristocratic governments. We shall attempt to show that some of the tribes or "political communities"<sup>7</sup> had a king who was appointed, rather than elected, for life by the elders of the tribe or political community, while others were governed by a *sabhā* or an aristocratic oligarchy. The sources further inform us that some tribes had both a *sabhā* or council, and a *samiti* or an assembly, while some appear to have had an assembly (*samiti*) and an unspecified number of kings (*rājānaḥ*). Thus, apart from the hereditary monarchy which appears to have been the most widespread form of government in the early Vedic period, and is virtually the only form recorded during the Brāhmaṇa period, we find what seem to be traces of at least four different types of aristo-

<sup>1</sup> *Hindu Polity*, pp. 12ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Corporate Life*, pp. 97ff.

<sup>3</sup> *State and Government*, pp. 80ff, 109ff.

<sup>4</sup> *Evolution of Indian Polity*, pp. 1ff.

<sup>5</sup> D. R. Bhandarkar, *Some Aspects of Ancient Hindu Polity*; R. S. Sharma, *Pol. Ideas and Inst.*, pp. 63ff.

<sup>6</sup> *vidatha* was not a political institution; cf. below, pp. 62ff.

<sup>7</sup> I. Schapera, *Government and Politics in Tribal Society*, p. 218. He uses the phrase to mean "anybody of people who have laws, rulers or government in common." Cf. Lucy Mair, *Primitive Government*, pp. 14ff.



~~cratic government through which a number of Vedic peoples carried out the administration of their political communities.~~

✓ (The Vedic people were primarily a cattle-raising, farming and hunting community, and according to a great classical scholar "an agricultural population" is "the best material for democracy."<sup>1</sup>) Glover continues his thesis: "... there is no difficulty in forming a democracy where the mass of the people live by agriculture or tending cattle. Being poor they have no leisure, and therefore do not often attend the assembly; and not having the necessities of life, they are always at work and do not covet the prosperity of others. Indeed, they find their employment pleasanter than the cares of government, or office where no great gains can be made out of them."<sup>2</sup> The implication of this statement is that, (while the mass of the people might be technically free citizens, with full rights, the actual government would be in the hands of a small, comparatively leisured elite.<sup>3</sup>)

Some historians have emphasized the point that the invading Aryans needed a strong king who could lead successful expeditions against the indigenous Indians and help his people acquire new land and homes.<sup>4</sup> No doubt a strong general was a great necessity in such a situation, but such a general could not fight successfully without the active support of all the male adults of the tribe. As great a king-commander as Alexander could not accomplish his ambition of the conquest of India up to the eastern ocean without the support of his armies.<sup>5</sup> Under such circumstances, the active support of all able-bodied members of the community would be needed in the battle field and at least most elders would have wished to know and discuss the plans for battle and further movements. When the existence of an entire people was threatened each would devote the best of his abilities to preserving the freedom of himself and his fellow tribesmen.

<sup>1</sup> T. R. Glover, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>3</sup> *Cp.* John Beattie's remark on the Nyoro chief: "A ruler—at least in the conditions of a tribal African kingdom—cannot keep all his power to himself, but must give some of it away; this is one of the major limitations on political authority" (*Bunyoro, an African Kingdom*, p. 28); *cf.*, Lucy Mair, *op. cit.*, pp. 139ff.

<sup>4</sup> *Cf.* *Vedic Index*, ii, p. 210; W. Stubbs, *Constitutional History of England*, i, pp. 59ff.

<sup>5</sup> McCrindle, *Alexander's Invasion*, pp. 1-39, 75-87, 163-5, etc.



There were cases in ancient Greece when the invading peoples established not monarchies, but aristocracies. In such conditions government was in the hands of a few of the conquerors, while other states were governed by oligarchies, consisting sometimes of as many as a thousand members, who deliberated on affairs, but delegated their authority in day-to-day administration to a small council.<sup>1</sup> It seems that some Aryan peoples, like the Greeks, established forms of aristocratic or oligarchic government in India while others formed what might, for want of a better term, be called "limited monarchies."

The Vedic literature does not provide any specific evidence to suggest the evolution of political institutions or the development of different forms of constitution, but this does not disprove such a development. Greek and Latin literature contains considerable data which has helped classical historians of political institutions to establish more or less accurately the origin and development of monarchy and its relation with aristocracy and democracy in Greece and Rome.<sup>2</sup> "Sparta was the one state of the Greek world which had maintained a steady tradition of unbroken continuity in its government: in other cities there had been a development which had almost everywhere followed the same order, from monarchy to aristocracy, from aristocracy to tyranny, from tyranny to democracy."<sup>3</sup>

[Similar attempts to establish a unified theory about the development of Indian political institutions and forms of constitution are beset with great difficulties.<sup>4</sup> The Vedic literature reveals different forms of government existing almost simultaneously in the Vedic period. If we might make any statements about the evolution of different constitutions in Vedic India on the basis of such precarious evidence, we would hypothetically suggest that, apart from hereditary kings, some Vedic political communities "selected" one of their members for the chieftainship of the tribe.<sup>5</sup> After some time, in the same communities, kingship vanished and an aristocracy

<sup>1</sup> Cf. L. Whibley, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

<sup>2</sup> Ernest Barker, *Greek Political Theory*, pp. 1-18.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3; cf. A.H. Greenidge, *Greek Constitutional History*, pp. 12ff; Beattie, *op. cit.*, pp. 28ff.

<sup>4</sup> We ignore the attempt of R. Shama Sastri (*op. cit.*, pp. xff) which is too fantastic to need detailed criticism.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. below, pp. 19ff.



represented by the *sabhā* became the governing power of the tribe.<sup>1</sup> In others, however, the *sabhā* and the *samiti* shared power, though the chief power would appear to have been in the hands of the former, which was composed of the best, richest, and strongest men of the community. This stage is reflected in some of the hymns of the *Atharva Veda* where the *sabhā* and the *samiti* both occur together.<sup>2</sup>

→ There appears to have been another development of the old tribal governments where the king was selected by the heads of families. In some of these, instead of one king being selected, several kings or nobles appear to have held the supreme authority without any formal consent of the qualified citizens. They ruled the tribe in conjunction with the *samiti* which appears to have represented various families of the community.<sup>3</sup> These seem the two most obvious stages in the development of non-monarchical institutions vaguely noticeable from our sources. A first stage would be when the chief was selected or consented to by the heads of families, and a second stage when such communities adopted three different kinds of constitutions. After the second stage of development, during the Brāhmaṇa period, most of the non-monarchical communities also fell into line with the old hereditary monarchies and hereditary monarchy ultimately became the universal form of government.<sup>4</sup>

✱ There is yet another possibility, more preferable, that these four different forms of government marked four successive stages of constitutional development in the non-monarchical communities. In the beginning the king was chosen by the heads of those families which formed the *viś*, showing the earliest stage in the career of the non-hereditary tribes. After some time, during the R̥g Vedic period, the practice of choosing the king was discontinued and leading men of the political community composed the *sabhā* which constituted the government. The third stage of political development was marked when the body composed of the heads of families of the *viś* crystallized into the *samiti* and the *sabhā*, and both these latter bodies ruled the tribe. During the fourth stage the *sabhā* appears to have changed its character. Instead of the members of the *sabhā*

<sup>1</sup> Cf. below, pp. 32ff.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. below, pp. 42ff.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. below, pp. 48ff.

<sup>4</sup> For the Buddhist republics, cf. pp. 85ff.



being called *sabhyas*, councillors, they began to be called *rājās*, nobles, while the *samiti* continued the same, thus accounting for the references to these two institutions in the same context. After this, one strong and powerful man from among the nobles rose higher in position than the rest and became the guardian of the community. His fellow nobles no longer shared as much power as they had in the earlier stage when the chief was merely *primus inter pares*. The leader then became the most powerful chief, unchallenged to the extent of appointing his own son to succeed him in office. The *samiti* also changed its role and became a king's council, renamed the *pariṣad*. Thus the "republican" communities more and more approximated to the monarchical ones already existing beside them and the process was virtually completed in the later Vedic period.

#### *Government with a Ruler Chosen by the Viś*

(There are about a dozen passages in the Vedic literature which indicate that in the early Vedic period kingship was not hereditary in some political communities, but each king governed with the consent of the heads of families.) Unfortunately, these references have been exploited by a number of noted historians to prove that in these tribal governments kingship was "elective" and not selective. We quote below the verses, mainly from the *Rg Veda* and the *Atharva Veda*, which have been utilized by Bloomfield, Jayaswal, Weber, Majumdar, Zimmer, Shama Sastri and others to support their theories:

1. Like people [*viśaḥ*] who choose [*vr̥ṇānā*] their ruler, they have with fear turned away from Vṛtra. <sup>1</sup>
2. Be with us; I have chosen thee: stand steadfast and immovable. Let all the people wish for thee: let not thy kingship fall away. <sup>2</sup>  
Be even here; fall not away; be like a mountain unre-moved.  
Stand steadfast here like Indra's self, and hold the kingship (*rāṣṭra*) in thy grasp. <sup>3</sup>  
Firm is the sky and firm the earth, and steadfast also are these hills.

<sup>1</sup> *RV*, x, 124, 8; *tā i viśo na rājānam vr̥ṇānā*; cp. *RV*, x, 174. All the following translations are our own, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, x, 173, 1; *viśastvā sarvā vāñchantu*; also at *AV*, vi, 87, 1.

<sup>3</sup> *RV*, x, 173, 2; also at *AV*, vi, 87, 2.

Steadfast is all this living world, and steadfast is this king of men.<sup>1</sup>

Let us think of Soma constantly, with constant sacrificial gift.

And then may Indra make the people (*viśah*) bring tribute to thee alone.<sup>2</sup>

3. Be all the quarters likeminded, concordant; let the assembly (*samitiḥ*) here suit you who are fixed.<sup>3</sup>

4. Unto thee hath come the kingdom; with splendour rise forward;

as lord of the people (*viśāmpatir*), sole king, bear thou rule; let all the directions call thee, O King become thou here one for waiting on, for homage.<sup>4</sup>

Thee let the people choose unto kingship, thee these five divine directions;

rest at the summit of royalty, at the pinnacle;

from thence, formidable, share out good things to us.<sup>5</sup>

5. They that are clever chariot-makers, that are skillful smiths—subject to me, do thou, O Parṇa!, make all people [*janān*] turn towards [me].<sup>6</sup>

They that are kings, king-makers, that are charioteers and troopleaders—subject to me, do thou, O Parṇa!—<sup>7</sup>

6. A tiger, upon the tiger's [skin], do thou stride out unto the quarters, let all the people [*viśas*] want thee, the waters of heaven, rich in milk.<sup>8</sup>

7. Increase, O Indra, this *kṣatriya* for me; make thou this man sole chief of peoples [*viśām*]; unman all his enemies;

make them subject to him in the contests for preeminence.<sup>9</sup>

Let this man be richest lord of riches;

let this king be people's lord of people [*viśām viśpati*].

In him, O Indra, put great splendours; destitute of splendour make thou his foe.<sup>10</sup>

I join thee Indra who gives superiority, by whom men conquer, Thou art not conquered,

Who shall make thee sole chief of the people (*janānām*), also uppermost of kings descended from Manu.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *RV*, x, 173, 4; also at *AV*, vi, 88, 1.

<sup>2</sup> *RV*, 6.

<sup>3</sup> *AV*, vi, 88, 3.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, iii, 4, 1.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, iii, 5, 6.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 7; see *Dīgha* (PTS edn.), II, pp. 233ff.

<sup>8</sup> *AV*, iv, 8, 4.

<sup>9</sup> *AV*, iv, 22, 1.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 3; cp. *Kauśi. Br.*, 14, 24ff.

<sup>11</sup> *AV*, iv, 22, 5.



- Of lion-aspect, do thou devour all the people [*viśo*];  
 of tiger-aspect, do thou beat down the foes;  
 sole chief, having Indra as companion, having conquered,  
 seize thou on the enjoyments of them that pay the foe.<sup>1</sup>
8. At his direction, O gods, be there light, sun, fire, and also  
 gold;  
 be his rivals [*sapatnā*] inferior to him;  
 to the highest firmament make this man ascend.  
 With what highest worship, O Jātavedas, thou didst bring  
 together draughts for Indra, therewith, O Agni, do thou  
 increase this man here;  
 set him in supremacy [*śraiṣṭhya*] over his fellows (*sajātānām*).<sup>2</sup>  
 I take to myself their sacrifice and splendour, their abundance  
 of wealth and their intents [*citta*], O Agni, be his rivals  
 inferior to him;  
 to the highest firmament make this man ascend.<sup>3</sup>

✕ Apart from the passages quoted above, there are at least two  
 hymns in the *Atharva Veda* which have been taken to indicate that  
 kings were sometimes banished from their realms and afterwards  
 recalled to be reelected and installed in their previous position:

9. For the waters let King Varuṇa call thee;  
 let Soma call thee for these people [*viśi*];  
 becoming a falcon, fly unto these people.<sup>4</sup>  
 Let the falcon lead hither from far the one to be called living  
 exiled in others' territory;  
 the two Aśvins make the path for thee easy to tread upon;  
 stay together about this man, ye his fellows.<sup>5</sup>  
 Let thine opponents call thee; thy friends have chosen thee;  
 Indra and Agni, and all the gods have maintained for thee  
 security among the people [*viśi*].<sup>6</sup>  
 Whatever fellow disputes thy call, and whatever outsider—  
 making him go away, O Indra, then do thou reinstate this  
 man here.<sup>7</sup>
10. Run forth hither from the furthest distance;  
 propitious to thee be heaven and earth both; King Varuṇa  
 here sayth this thus;  
 he here has called thee; do thou come to this place.  
 Like a human Indra, go thou away;

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, i, 9, 2-3.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 4; also *Kauṣi. Br.*, 84, 16, 17.

<sup>4</sup> *AV*, iii, 3, 3.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 4; *ta imam sajātā abhisam-viśadhvam*.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

for thou hast concurred in concord with men;  
 he here has called thee in his own station;  
 he shall sacrifice to the gods, and he shall arrange the people  
 (*viśaḥ*).<sup>1</sup>

Jayaswal uses a verse from the *Atharva Veda* to show that "the king was elected for his whole life".

11. Rule here a mighty benevolent [king] up to the tenth decade of thy life.<sup>2</sup>

Jayaswal uses another verse from the same hymn to prove that the king was expected to secure material prosperity to the people:

12. Fix thy mind upon the bestowal of wealth.  
 Then do thou, mighty, distribute wealth amongst us.<sup>3</sup>

These are the passages, *in toto*, on which rests the theory that the kingship was sometimes elective in early India.

Before discussing Jayaswal's view on the election of early Indian kings, let us consider two other points which he raises in connection with the origin of monarchy, its relation to other forms of constitution, and the significance of the derivation of the term *rājan*. "The word *rājan* and its original *rāj* literally mean a ruler. They are connected with the Latin *rex*. But Hindu political theorists have given them a philosophic derivation. King is called *rājā* because his duty is 'to please' (*rañj*) the people by maintaining good government. . . . Both orthodox and heterodox branches of the race had adopted it. It was a national interpretation and a national theory of Constitution."<sup>4</sup> We agree with Jayaswal in equating the Sanskrit *rājan* with the Latin *rex*, and derive it from the root *rāj* (*(rājati, te)*, "to rule" or "to shine."<sup>5</sup> But the "philosophic" and "national interpretation" given to the term, deriving *rājan* from the root *rañj*, "to please", is of later origin and hence cannot be accepted as relevant to the period.

In discussing the origin of monarchy, Jayaswal depends on the statement of Megasthenes<sup>6</sup> and tries to support it from the R̥g Vedic evidence. [He states that "monarchy was the earliest form of

<sup>1</sup> *AV*, iii, 4, 5-6.

<sup>2</sup> *Hindu Polity*, p. 189; *AV*, iii, 4, 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Hindu Polity*, p. 190; *AV*, iii, 4, 4.

<sup>4</sup> Jayaswal, *Hindu Polity*, p. 183.

<sup>5</sup> Cf., Monier Williams, *op. cit.*, s.v. *rāj*; *rañj*; also below, p. 48fn. 3.

<sup>6</sup> McCrindle, *Megasthenes and Arrian*, p. 200.



organized government in India. This is supported by the Rig-Veda where Monarchy is the normal and the only form of government known.”<sup>1</sup> We have already discussed this question at length,<sup>2</sup> and here it will suffice to note that Jayaswal forgets that he himself has used at least one hymn from the *Rg Veda* in support of his election theory.<sup>3</sup>

Jayaswal is not only a keen supporter of the election theory, but also insists that the *samiti* elected the king. He says that “the king was elected by the people assembled in the *samiti*. The people assembled are said to elect him to rulership unanimously. The *samiti* appoints him. He is asked to hold the state.”<sup>4</sup> Out of the nine passages employed in support of his statement, only one has *dhruvāya te samitiḥ kalpatāmiha*, which he renders “and for firmness the assembly here creates (appoints) you”.<sup>5</sup> The word *viś*, in connection with a word for choosing or desiring (*vr̥ṇānā* and *vāñchantu*), is found as many as six times in the same passages.<sup>6</sup> In fact, there is hardly any hymn quoted above which does not refer to the *viś* as either wanting the king or choosing him. Even in the hymn in which the *samiti* occurs, we also have the term *viś* in the opening verse.<sup>7</sup> On this basis we firmly reject the role of the *samiti* in establishing a man in kingship.

Moreover, the word *vr̥ṇatām*, from the root *vr̥* (*vr̥ṇoti*, —*nute*) has been taken to mean “to elect” by all supporters of the election theory. In the *Rg Veda* and the *Atharva Veda* it means “to choose”, or “to select”.<sup>8</sup> This root might also be rendered as “to elect”, but it depends on the context in which it is found. It might mean “to elect” if in a given passage we had evidence of two or more candidates contesting for the chieftancy of the political community. But no reference to anything like an electoral contest is to be found anywhere in the Vedic literature. No evidence is put forth by this school of historians to show that the people elected one candidate and rejected the other. The sources do suggest that the people, or

<sup>1</sup> *Hindu Polity*, p. 183.

<sup>2</sup> See above, pp. 15ff.

<sup>3</sup> Jayaswal, *Hindu Polity*, p. 186; the hymn used is *RV*, x, 173 (see his fn.).

<sup>4</sup> Jayaswal, *Hindu Polity*, p. 186.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 187.

<sup>6</sup> *RV*, x, 124, 8; 173, 1; *AV*, vi, 87, 1; iii, 4, 2; 3, 5; iv, 8, 4.

<sup>7</sup> *AV*, vi, 88, 1; *dhruvo rājā viśāmayam*. In *RV*, x, 173, 1, 4, 6. The *samiti* does not figure and the term *viś* occurs at least three times.

<sup>8</sup> Monier Williams, *op. cit.*, s.v. *vr̥*.



- ✓ rather the heads of the families, chose the king. If they approved a king unanimously, presumably by acclamation, this would hardly be an election in the modern sense.

Zimmer's main argument for the election theory is based on *tā im viśo na rājānam vṛṇānā*, which he translates as "wie die Gae sich den König küren."<sup>1</sup> We agree with Zimmer that here the allusion might be to "the people (*viśo*) electing (*vṛṇānā*) their king," but in no single passage quoted above is there mention of a particular rival for the same post. In fact, throughout the vast range of Vedic literature there is no allusion to another candidate. Therefore, ✓ the verb *vṛṇānā* here, in the historical context, will mean merely "to choose" or "to select," though the verse can be rendered for literary purposes also as, "like the people electing their king." However, to look for an actual political election in this verse would be stretching the imagination too far. The passage, like the others mentioned above, only indicates that the king owed his position to ✓ the consent of the important members of the political community, and not to the entire adult population.

Another passage used by Weber to support this view comes from the *Atharva Veda*—*tvām viśo vṛṇatām rājyāya*.<sup>2</sup> It also contains a verb derived from the much discussed root *vṛ*. It is not clear that this implies that the people played a decisive role in establishing a man in kingship, at least in the constitutional sense. The same can be said of Weber's comments on another Atharvan hymn.<sup>3</sup>

Bloomfield's support for this theory comes mainly from those Atharvan hymns where the people (*viś*) are said to be "wanting" or "desiring" the king (*vāñchantu*), and from the fact that this office is associated with verbs derived from the root *vṛ*.<sup>4</sup> We do not dispute that these words are literally incapable of being rendered as referring to the people electing the king, but our main objection is that there is no other evidence for such elections.<sup>5</sup> However, it is clear that in such tribes, at that time at least, the kings were not hereditary. They were accepted or consented to by the chief members of the tribe, as Geldner suggested.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *RV*, x, 124, 8; cf. Zimmer, *Altindisches Leben*, pp. 162ff.

<sup>2</sup> *AV*, iii, 4, 2; cf. A. Weber, *Indische Studien*, xvii, p. 190.

<sup>3</sup> Weber, *ibid.*, pp. 188ff.

<sup>4</sup> *AV*, tr. M. Bloomfield, p. 330.

<sup>5</sup> Above, pp. 22ff.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Comments on *RV*, x, 124, 8; 173; cf., *Vedische Studien*, ii, 303; A. A. Macdonell, *History of Sanskrit Literature*, p. 158.



Majumdar, who mainly follows Zimmer in his interpretations of the R̥g Vedic hymns, believes that the role of the people in establishing kings was continued down to the 8th century A.D.<sup>1</sup> Concerning the elections of Rūdradāman (c. A.D. 130), Harṣavardhana (c. A.D. 606) and Goṇāla (c. A.D. 750), we agree entirely with Altekar when he comments that "it is no doubt true that Rūdradāman and Goṇāla are expressly described as being elected to the kingship by their people;<sup>2</sup> but these statements occur in panegyric documents composed by their court poets and cannot be taken too seriously."<sup>3</sup> Majumdar's view, like that of Jayaswal, has no solid ground, but we shall consider below the question of who formed the *vis* in choosing the king.

Shama Sastri argues that at first a leader was occasionally elected to execute some given expedition, but that this did not "seem to have answered their purpose after they settled themselves in the country." This statement, together with his belief that the people "felt the need for the election of a permanent chief to be at their head and carry on the internal administration of their settlements,"<sup>4</sup> does not correspond with the sources. The only thing these suggest is that in some tribal governments kings occupied the chiefship not because their fathers had been kings, but because they were put there by the important members of their community.

Another weak point of the election theory lies in the two hymns of the *Atharva Veda* which refer to the restoration and reinstallation of banished kings.<sup>5</sup> If this political community had the practice of electing their king, they would have found some other candidates worthy of the post if the former king was deposed. The fact that they recalled the banished king unmistakably supports his selection, and rejects his election. The traditions preserved in the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*,<sup>6</sup> the *Arthaśāstra*<sup>7</sup> and the *Mahābhārata*<sup>8</sup> and the legend of the first king Mahāsammata, "consented to by all," of the Buddhist texts<sup>9</sup>, refer to this kind of selection or choice as we

<sup>1</sup> *Corporate Life*, pp. 79-113.

<sup>2</sup> Junāgaḍ Inscription, *EI*, iv, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> *State and Government*, p. 83; cf. pp. 80-4.

<sup>4</sup> Shama Sastri, *op. cit.*, pp. 25ff.

<sup>5</sup> *AV*, iii, 3, 4-6; 4, 5-6.

<sup>6</sup> *Ait. Br.*, i, 14.

<sup>7</sup> *Arthaśāstra*, i, 13.

<sup>8</sup> *Mbh.* (Poona edn.), *Sānti Parva*, chap. 67, 2ff; 11-38.

<sup>9</sup> *Mahāvamsa*, chap. ii; *Jāt.*, i, pp. 395, 470; v, p. 187, etc.



✓ have indicated, and not to election as such. (Almost all the dynasties subsequent to 600 B.C. passed on the crown on the hereditary principle.<sup>1</sup>)

This can be clearly realized when we notice that the very idea of the election of the king appeared totally strange to the 12th century historian Kalhaṇa. He writes that when the Utpala dynasty came to an end in Kashmir in A.D. 939, one Kamalavardhana managed to get effective control of the government. Instead of crowning himself king immediately, he asked the Brāhmaṇas of the capital to elect somebody to the kingship, thinking they would naturally support his claim. Kalhaṇa then says that it was the most foolish procedure that could ever have been thought of, comparable to the conduct of a person who, not accepting the love offer of a woman of exceptional beauty coming herself to his house, infatuated and begging to be accepted, sends for her the next day to inquire whether she would come. In this particular case the Brāhmaṇas went on discussing the question for days, without coming to a decision. In the meanwhile, another claimant to the throne, Śūravarman, more forcefully pressed his claims and occupied the capital; the Brāhmaṇas then hastened to anoint him king.<sup>2</sup>

Some significant outlines of the constitution of this type of governmental organization emerge from the Vedic passages and the points discussed above. Moreover, the characteristics of such a tribal government can be summarized and exemplified from parallels found in Greek and Roman institutions as they flourished during Homeric times and during the regal period of Rome, respectively.

In this type of political community the ruler was not hereditary, but "chosen by the *viś*." <sup>3</sup> In the passages quoted above, the word *viś* occurs as many as seventeen times in connection with choosing the king or being the king of the *viś*, whereas in one passage <sup>4</sup> we have the expression *janānām rājā*. Here *jana* probably stands for *viś*. *Samiti*, as we have seen, only occurs once in connection with appointing or creating (*kalpatām*) the king. Even in this verse, this meaning is emphasized only by Jayaswal, whereas Whitney takes *kalpatām* in the sense of "suiting," and translates it as "let the

<sup>1</sup> Altekar, *State and Government*, p. 84.

<sup>2</sup> *Rājataranginī*, vii, 773ff.; cf. Altekar, *State and Government*, p. 84 and fn. 3.

<sup>3</sup> As the Germani chose their chiefs; cf. Tacitus, *Germania*, chap. 13; cp. C. Drekmeier, *Kingship and Community in Early India*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>4</sup> *AV*, iv, 22, 5.



gathering (*samiti*) here suit (*klp*) thee (who art) fixed".<sup>1</sup> If taken in this light, the *samiti* has nothing to do with the choice of the king, though the fact that it existed is above suspicion. Moreover, this passage might well apply to another type of tribal government with kings and *samiti* ruling jointly.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, (it was the *viś* which chose the king. But *viś* in the early Vedic texts literally means a "community," "tribe," "race," or in the plural "subjects," "people,"<sup>3</sup> and as such the evidence must mean that the people of a tribe chose their king. However, it does not seem feasible that the entire adult population participated in this choice. In a patriarchal society the father, as the head of the family, was the qualified member of the community who could take part in the deliberations of the public business. One Rg Vedic hymn seems to support this view: "Our eldest brother or kinsman, the leader, speaks out."<sup>4</sup> And the following verse of the same hymn alludes to the choice of the god Agni as a priest for the sacrifice.<sup>5</sup> The context might suggest that the eldest brother (*jyeṣṭha bhrātā*), the leader (*prathamo*), was the head of the family, probably in a case where the father is not alive. Moreover, the family headship held by the eldest man of the family was probably such a common feature of Vedic society that the composers of the hymns did not think it worth mentioning, though it appears to have been indirectly alluded to in a number of hymns where mention is made of the eldest (*jyeṣṭha* and *prathama*).<sup>6</sup>

Describing the Greek aristocracy based on conquest, Whibley comments:

A special form of aristocracy, in which also the ruling class owned the best land of the state, was that arising from the conquest of one race by another invading race. . . . The conquerors as a whole constitute a class superior to the conquered, of whom some are reduced to serfdom, while others occupy a more favourable position. This special division of classes is typical of the aristocracy of conquest. We find this aristo-

<sup>1</sup> *AV*, (HOS edn.), vii, p. 346 on *AV*, vi, 88, 3.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. below, pp. 48ff.

<sup>3</sup> Monier Williams, *op. cit.*, s.v. *viś*; cp. K.C. Mishra, *JBRS*, 1958, xliv, pts. iii-iv, pp. 204ff.

<sup>4</sup> *RV*, x, 11, 2; *bhrātā no jyeṣṭha prathamo vi vocati*.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>6</sup> *RV*, x, 11, 2; 71, 1; 78, 2; vi, 15, 15; viii, 70, 1; ii, 38, 5; iv, 2, 15; 33, 5; i, 100, 4. Sometimes they are referred to in plural number; cf. V. Bandhu, *RV Word-Index*, s.v.; V. Bandhu, *AV Alph. Index*, s.v.



cracy, on more or less uniform plan, not only in the Dorian States of the Peloponnesus, in Crete, and to a certain extent in Thera, but also in Thessaly: while both in Boeotia and Elis the ruling class owed their position to the right of conquest.<sup>1</sup>

Whibley further divides these aristocracies into two classes. In some all members of the conquering race were equally privileged; in others there existed "differences of rank within the circle of the conquerors, which gave to some families a superiority over the rest".<sup>2</sup>

We believe that in the Vedic political communities such a distinction of rank existed and only the leading families, which might have been fairly numerous, actually took part in the choice of the king. These people were invaders like their Greek counterparts. In some Greek states all members of the conquering race had equal rights. In India, however, we find an elite that exercised the governmental authority without a king and ruled through the important leaders of the *sabhā*, thus forming a different type of government.<sup>3</sup>

(We do not know if the term *vis* can be interpreted as technically applying to the heads of families of a political community who were vested with the full rights of citizenship and were entitled to participate in the choice of the king. It is possible that not all such qualified citizens actually attended the choice-meeting or consent-ceremony.) The condition of society reflected in Homer's *Iliad* seems to be similar to that of such states.

{Of the manner and procedure of choice we know almost nothing from the Vedic sources.} In the Greek assembly, the manner of showing approval or dissent was by shouting.<sup>4</sup> The Germans, at the time Tacitus wrote, expressed their approval by the clamour of their weapons which they proudly carried with them.<sup>5</sup> Freeman says of the Homeric assembly that "there is no formal reckoning of votes; but I suspect that any formal reckoning of votes is a refinement belonging to a much later stage of political life. To shout or to clash the arms is the primitive way of declaring assent."<sup>6</sup> That the Vedic assembly expressed their approval by observing silence

<sup>1</sup> Whibley, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>3</sup> See below, pp. 32ff.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Whibley, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

<sup>5</sup> *Germania*, chap. 11. p. 281.

<sup>6</sup> E. A. Freeman, *Comparative Politics*, p. 206.



in the manner of the Buddhist *Saṅgha*, though not impossible, does not seem probable in the light of the general attitude of the period as reflected in the *R̥g Veda*.

Though the Sanskrit *jana* appears to be the linguistic counterpart of the Greek *genos* and Latin *gens*, we agree with Keith when he equates the Sanskrit *viś* with the Iranian *vis* and believes it to be "a real parallel to the Latin *gens* and the Greek *genos*."<sup>1</sup> Thus, the "body of *viś*" in its constitutional sense would correspond to the Greek *gerousia* or the council of elders, which is applied in the Homeric poems to the councillors of the king.<sup>2</sup> Greenidge equates this Greek institution with its Roman counterpart. He says, "as the Latin word *patres* applied to the Roman senate was probably derived from *patres-familias*, so γέροντες may mean 'heads of families,' the elders of the tribe. The councillors of Sparta preserved this name into historic times, and it can be proved that the γερωνδία of that state ever continued to represent the noble clans of the community".<sup>3</sup>

(The constitution of the Greek *gerontes* and the Roman *patres-familias* highly favours our view that the *viś* in its political aspect was a body composed of the heads of families of the political community.) Such a similarity of composition in the institutions of the early Indo-European peoples is not surprising. But the position and function of the three bodies appear to be widely different. In Homeric Greece the king consulted the *gerousia* of his own accord and to an extent also following the tribal custom, but he did not owe his position to it. In Rome the *patres-familias*, or representatives of the burgesses, elected the *rex* who, after his election to kingship, became "the supreme judge, the high-priest, and the commander-in-chief in war." In T. M. Taylor's opinion "he was a simple Roman burgess chosen by his peers to fill the position of their leader; but after election they owed him allegiance just as much as if he ruled by right of divine descent. He held in his hands the full *Imperium* or Command of the State, both in peace and war; the power that had made him king *could not constitutionally depose him if he abused his trust*;<sup>4</sup> he was supreme for life and there were

<sup>1</sup> *CHI*, i, p. 91.

<sup>2</sup> Greenidge, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>3</sup> *Loc. cit.*; cf. W. E. Heitland, *Roman Republic*, i, pp. 33-7.

<sup>4</sup> Our italics.



no legal checks upon his powers of administration.”<sup>1</sup> On the contrary (the Indian *viś* reserved the right to banish a king. The reasons for banishment are not clear from the texts and even after his appointment he was not “the supreme judge, the high-priest,” though he probably was the commander of the armies.

From the above discussion it is apparent that all heads of families did not necessarily participate in the choice of the king though they may have been theoretically authorized to do so. Secondly, numerous important men represented the *viś* of the tribe and wielded the real authority. It was no doubt they who delegated the ruling power to one of their leaders. Moreover, there are five passages in the *Atharva Veda*, one of which has been already pointed out by Jayaswal,<sup>2</sup> which indicate that the ruler in such political communities was “appointed for life.” The speaker of the following citations is a king:

“The *Parna*, (amulet) Soma’s formidable power, hath come, given by Indra, governed by Varuṇa; may I, shining greatly, wear it (the amulet) in order to live the full length of life for a hundred autumns (*śataśārādāya*).”<sup>3</sup> The following three verses are also to the same effect: “Splendour set thou in my body, power, force, vigour, strength; unto Indra-like action, unto heroism, unto life of a hundred autumn’s do I accept thee [*Parna*].”<sup>4</sup> “Unto refreshment thee [the amulet], unto strength thee, unto force, unto power thee, unto prosperity thee do I carry about, unto wearing of royalty for a hundred autumns (*śataśārādāya*).”<sup>5</sup> The last verse supporting the king’s life-tenure of office is as follows: “Thee [the amulet] with the seasons, with them of the seasons; thee unto life-time, unto splendour; with the brilliancy of the year—with that we make [thee] cheek by jowl.”<sup>6</sup>

The five passages quoted above not only refer to the appointment of the king for life, like the life-tenure of the Roman *rex*, but also point towards the qualities which this accepted hero of the tribe was supposed to possess. References to his “power, force, vigour, strength and heroism” cannot be unduly emphasized.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> T. M. Taylor, *op. cit.*, pp. 7ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Hindu Polity*, p. 187; *AV*, iii, 4, 7.

<sup>3</sup> *AV*, iii, 5, 4.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, xix, 37, 2; *prati grhṇāmi śataśārādāya*.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, xix, 37, 3; *abhibhūyāya tvā rāṣṭr bhṛtyāya paryūhāmi śataśārādāya*.

<sup>6</sup> *AV*, xix, 37, 4; unto life-time, *bhūtasya*; cf. *AV*, vii, 35.

<sup>7</sup> *AV* xix, 37, 2, 3, 4; iii, 5, 4; *Sāma Veda*, iv, 11, 4, 1, etc.



These tribes, like others in a similar situation in the ancient world and some contemporary tribes, prized physical strength and successful leadership in warfare as the highest virtue. According to Tacitus, this quality won the greatest admiration for a leader among the early Germans.<sup>1</sup> The Nuers of Sudan esteem courage as "the highest virtue and skill in fighting the most necessary accomplishment."<sup>2</sup> These examples can be multiplied from the early history of Greece and Rome and other tribes of that time.

In such a political community where the people reserved for themselves the supreme right to delegate the leadership of the tribe to a suitable candidate, they would also have looked for the quality of oratory in their prospective ruler. Furthermore, the great love of the Vedic people for chariot-racing<sup>3</sup> and dice contests<sup>4</sup> indicates that skill in such contests may also have been a factor in being chosen for the kingship. This is supported by many later legends which look back to the period and it is probably this which later led to the formal prescription of dicing and racing during the *rājasūya* ceremony of a hereditary king.<sup>5</sup>

This man would naturally have shared their religious beliefs and must have shown enthusiasm in performing rites and rituals to win the favour and blessing of the gods. Apart from such considerations, another factor that would have been important in the leadership of the community was that after his successful expeditions and raids on hostile tribes, the leader apportioned the spoils fairly among his fellow men. The fact that he thus enriched the tribe would have been greatly in his favour.<sup>6</sup> At this period we do not find any definite traces, however, of caste and the superiority of the Kṣatriyas in military and governmental affairs.

The restoration hymns reveal another factor which appears primary from the actual administrative point of view. We have noticed that at least in some cases the chosen kings could be banished from their territories. However, it seems doubtful if any real terri-

<sup>1</sup> *Germania*, chap. 13ff, pp. 283ff.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer of the South Sudan*, pp. 291, 256ff, etc.

<sup>3</sup> *RV*, ii, 27, 12; 31, 7; iv, 45; i, 12, 22; viii, 69, 15-16, etc.; cf. Bandhu, *RV Word-Index*, pp. 438-40.

<sup>4</sup> *RV*, i, 41, 9; 112, 24; x, 27, 17; 34, 6; 7, 13. etc.; cf. Bandhu *RV Word-Index*, p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> *Śat. Br.*, v, 1, 1, 12ff; *Tait. Br.*, i, 7, 3ff; *Ait. Br.*, viii, 15ff, etc.

<sup>6</sup> *AV*, iii, 4, 4-5.



torial sense was possessed by these Vedic peoples, although Schapera, on the basis of his anthropological studies, "has shown that the smallest and simplest 'political communities' have their recognized territory."<sup>1</sup> Though the term *viś* does not appear to have had a territorial connotation during the Vedic period, these political communities no doubt had their specific territory, the boundaries of which must have been constantly shifting. It was most probably to beyond the recognized tribal lands that a king was banished.

From the fact of the banishment of a king,<sup>2</sup> one question comes to mind: who ruled over the political community in his absence? We have no evidence that the institution of the *interrex* existed in Vedic India. However, it seems obvious that the king was assisted in the matter of administration by some leading men of the tribe, before his banishment. Though we have no direct mention of such a small body of councillors, it can be inferred from the situation and the actual needs of administration that such a council should have existed. Of course, the exact number of such a council cannot be determined.

#### *Government of the Sabhā*

The second type of non-monarchical tribal government, we suggest, was that in which the *sabhā*, or an aristocratic council, wielded the supreme power.<sup>3</sup> This variety can be understood as a mixture of aristocratic and oligarchic elements. [These political communities, unlike the first type of tribal government,<sup>4</sup> had no king; and further unlike another variety to be discussed below,<sup>5</sup> had no *samiti* or tribal assembly.] Our main evidence to support the claim that in some political communities only the *sabhā* existed, comes from the *R̥g Veda*. In the older *maṇḍalas* of the text the term *sabhā* occurs at least three times,<sup>6</sup> while it appears twice each in the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Mair, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> *AV*, iii, 3, 3-5; *Tait. Sam.*, ii, 3, 1.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Zimmer, *op. cit.*, p. 172, takes the *sabhā* to mean a "village assembly"; cf. Majumdar, *Corporate Life*, pp. 117ff.; cf. F. F. A. Hillebrandt, *Vedische Mythologie*, ii, p. 124 fn. 6, who does not see the distinction between the *sabhā* and the *samiti*; cf. *Vedic Index*, ii, pp. 430ff.

<sup>4</sup> See above, pp. 19ff.

<sup>5</sup> See below, pp. 42ff.

<sup>6</sup> *RV*, ii, 24, 13; iv, 2, 5; vi, 28, 6.



first <sup>1</sup> and the tenth,<sup>2</sup> and once in the eighth *maṇḍala*.<sup>3</sup> Altogether there are eight references to the institution of the *sabhā* and not once does the *sabhā* have a role in selecting the king.<sup>4</sup> In fact, in *Ṛg Veda* the word *rājan* is not found in the context of the *sabhā*. This suggests that tribes thus governed had presidents called *sabhāpatis*.

The word *samiti* does occur in the *Ṛg Veda*, but only in the first, ninth and tenth *maṇḍalas* which are accepted by almost all Indologists as compositions of a slightly later period than the "family *maṇḍalas*" (Books ii-vii).<sup>5</sup> It is indeed noteworthy that, even in these *maṇḍalas* where both the *sabhā* and the *samiti* occur, not once do they figure together in the same hymn, let alone in the same verse. (This analysis of the *Ṛg Vedic* hymns indicates that the political communities which had *sabhās* had no *samitis*, at least during the *Ṛg Vedic* period. Moreover, it is significant that the *sabhā*-ruled tribes appear, in point of time, to have been a little earlier than those where the *samiti* existed.)

This conclusion is further confirmed by a close examination of the *Atharvan* hymns. In the *Atharva Veda*, there are altogether seventeen mentions of the *sabhā*,<sup>6</sup> of which in at least five hymns the *samiti* does not figure at all,<sup>7</sup> whereas in two hymns the *sabhā*<sup>8</sup> and the *samiti*<sup>9</sup> both occur, but in different verses. We believe that at least the five hymns in which *sabhā* alone appears refer to the *sabhā*-ruled governments of the Vedic period. Those passages in which *sabhā* and *samiti* both occur we interpret as referring to another variety of non-monarchical political community, where both the *sabhā*, the council, and the *samiti*, the assembly, ruled. This type of constitution we shall consider in the next section.

There is further evidence to support the existence of the *sabhā* and the emphasis put by the later sources on its judicial functions

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, i, 91, 20; 167, 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, x, 34, 6; 71, 10.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, viii, 4, 9.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, i, 91, 20; 167, 3; ii, 24, 13; iv, 2, 5; vi, 28, 6; viii, 4, 9; x, 34, 6; 71, 10.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, i, 95, 8; ix, 92, 6; x, 11, 8; 97, 6; 166, 4; 191, 3.

<sup>6</sup> *AV*, iii, 29, 1; iv, 21, 6; v, 31, 6; vii, 13, 1-2; 39, 4; viii, 10, 8-9; ix, 11, 6; xii, 1, 56; xv, 9, 2-3; xix, 55, 5.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, iii, 29, 1; iv, 21, 6; v, 31, 6; vii, 39, 4; xix, 55, 5.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, vii, 13, 2; viii, 10, 8-9.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, vii, 13, 1; viii, 10, 10-11.



is of considerable import. The *Vājasaneyī Samhitā* has at least six mentions of the *sabhā* and its derivatives—*sabhya*, *sabhāsad*, *sabhāpati*, *sabhācara* and *sabhāsthānu*.<sup>1</sup> The *Maitrāyaṇī*<sup>2</sup> and *Taittirīya*<sup>3</sup> *Samhitās* also refer to the *sabhya*, *sabhā* and *sabhāsad*. The *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* and the *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* refer to the *sabhā* at least nine times;<sup>4</sup> the *Kāthaka Samhitā*,<sup>5</sup> the *Kauśītaki Brāhmaṇa*<sup>6</sup> and the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*<sup>7</sup> also make mention of the *sabhā*, *sabhāpati*, and the *sabhāsad*. There are numerous references to the *sabhā* in later literature, but in these places the term means the council of the king and his palace or hall of justice. There may have been *sabhās* in the monarchical tribal governments also, but here we are concerned only with those political communities which were non-monarchical and where the *sabhā* was the supreme and only political institution. ✕

An examination of all the occurrences reveals that the mentions of the *sabhā* as a “council” are slightly fewer than the references to the *sabhya* or *sabhyāḥ*, *sabhācara* and *sabhāga* (members of the council or councillors), *sabhāsads* and the *sabhāpati*. There are a few references which indicate that the word *sabhā* might refer to the “council-hall,”<sup>8</sup> which was also a centre for playing dice.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the Vedic *sabhā* was to a large extent the forerunner of the *santhāgāra* of the republics of the Buddhist texts.<sup>10</sup> The term was used in a sense similar to the later *darbār*, implying both the council and the council-hall. But the Mughal *darbār* was composed of the courtiers who advised the emperor when he chose to consult with them, whereas the Vedic *sabhā*, in this type of republic, was the supreme political authority of the tribe.

(Our contention that the *sabhā* was a “council” composed only of the important men of the tribe and not of all the heads of the families,) as was the case in the political communities where the

referred to  
in the text

<sup>1</sup> *Vāj. Sam.*, iii, 45; xx, 17; xvi, 24; xxx, 6; 18.

<sup>2</sup> *Mait. Sam.*, i, 6, 11; iv, 7, 4.

<sup>3</sup> *Tait. Sam.*, ix, 5, 3, 2; iii, 4, 8, 6.

<sup>4</sup> *Śat. Br.*, ii, 3, 2, 3; iii, 3, 4, 15; v, 31, 1, 10; *Tait. Br.*, i, 1, 10, 3-6; i, 2, 1, 26; iii, 4, 2, 1; iii, 4, 16, 1.

<sup>5</sup> *Kāth. Sam.*, viii, 7; xvii, 13, etc.

<sup>6</sup> *Kauśi. Br.*, vii, 9.

<sup>7</sup> *Chān. Up.*, v, 3, 6; viii, 14, 1.

<sup>8</sup> *RV*, viii, 4, 9; *AV*, xix, 55, 5; *Chān. Up.*, viii, 14, 1; v, 3, 6.

<sup>9</sup> *RV*, x, 34, 6; *AV*, vii, 13, 2; v, 31, 6; xii, 3, 46; *Vāj. Sam.*, xxx, 18; *Tait. Br.*, iii, 4, 16, 1.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. below, p. 103.



king was chosen by the *viś*, rests mainly on the frequent occurrences of words like *sabheya* (worthy of the *sabhā* or council), *sabhya* (member of the *sabhā*), *sabhāga* (one going to or into the *sabhā*), or *sabhācara* (one either going to or moving in the *sabhā*) and *sabhāvān* (a member of the *sabhā* or one worthy of the *sabhā*). Some references to the *sabhāsads*,<sup>1</sup> or those who sit at a council or are "assessors" in court, and to the *sabhāpati*,<sup>2</sup> the "president" of the *sabhā*, further enlighten us regarding the officers of the *sabhā*. The mention of the *sabhāsāha*,<sup>3</sup> one superior or eminent in the *sabhā*, and of his friends taking pride in him, points either to his being a good debater or to his being elected to some office such as that of the *sabhāsad* or the *sabhāpati*.

(There is considerable data to prove that in order to be a member of the *sabhā* or to hold an important office in the government one had to have some distinction, whether in warfare, debating and eloquence, learning, or property in grain and cattle.) The emphasis put on strength, valour, courage and firmness in the Vedic hymns is quite obvious. "Sing to your Agni with each song, at every sacrifice, for *strength*. Come let us praise the *wise* and ever-lasting God, even as a well-beloved friend. To the *son of strength*, in battle may he be our help and *strengtheners*, yea, be the *protector* of our lives *great hero*, *give us strength*, *most youthful*, *possessing wealth*, send us thy *bounties*; the *charioteer*, of earthly *wealth*, bring *plenteous food*, make wealth easy to be found; a *flawless skin*, in glory *equal to the gods*, look upon us in the fight," etc."<sup>4</sup> (These are the attributes and qualities prayed for and praised in the gods. Naturally these qualities were to be looked for in the members of the *sabhā*.)

(That the people honoured and heeded those who could protect their cows, fields and homes from enemies is clear from another hymn of the *R̥g Veda*.<sup>5</sup>) The strength of the kine was glorified in their councils (*sabhāsu*).<sup>6</sup> This verse is further repeated in the *Atharva Veda*<sup>7</sup> and probably implies that the man who possessed the largest number of cattle spoke loudest in the *sabhā*. It is un-

<sup>1</sup> *Mait. Sam.*, i, 6, 11; *Kāth. Sam.*, vii, 7; *Tait. Br.*, i, 2, 1, 26; *Ait. Br.*, 21, 14, etc.

<sup>2</sup> *Vāj. Sam.*, xvi, 24; *Tait. Sam.*, iv, 5, 3, 2.

<sup>3</sup> *RV*, x, 71, 10; *sarve nandanti yasasāgatena sabhāsāhena sakhyā sakhāyah*.

<sup>4</sup> *RV*, vi, 48; our italics.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, vi, 28; *AV*, iv, 21.

<sup>6</sup> *RV*, vi, 28, 6; *brhad vo vaya ucyate sabhāsu*.

<sup>7</sup> *AV*, iv, 21, 6.



doubtedly indicative of an element of aristocracy or oligarchy of wealth. "Indra, thy friend is fair of form or handsome [*surūpa*], and rich in horses [*aśvi*], chariots [*rathī*] and kine [*gomān*]. He evermore hath food and wealth, and always radiant, he goes to the council [*sabhām*]." <sup>1</sup> Another hymn indicates that learned men also attended the *sabhā* and through their wisdom gained wealth in the form of either worldly possessions or more probably of fame and glory.<sup>2</sup> Polite and refined speech was referred to as *sabhāvatī*, from the manners and etiquette of the *sabhā*.<sup>3</sup>

It is evident from the verses of yet another hymn that men of mighty deeds, masters of wealth, and good leaders full of vital strength were respected in the community. The poets are full of admiration for the "heroes among heroes" (*vīreṣu vīrān*) who could command great power in the political community.<sup>4</sup> These people craved for "brave friends, rich in kine and sheep and horses; rich in sacred food and children; in full council, vast wealth and lasting."<sup>5</sup> This verse not only indicates the qualifications of a "councillor," such as bravery in the field, possession of kine, etc., but also appears to point to the fact that a "councillor" (*sabhāvān*) was preferably a father (*prajāvān*). In such societies as this children, especially sons, were a source of strength. Daughters might be useful in making alliances between one family and another, while without a son a man might have none to avenge him if he were killed in a blood-feud. But a childless man, if otherwise powerful, might surely have found a place in the *sabhā*. It is also noteworthy that the emphasis on children would tend to exclude men under 30 or 35, for the advantage of having children would only be felt when the boys were capable of fighting and the girls marriageable. In addition to the above qualifications, the pride felt by the friends of a *sabhāsāha*, one eminent in the council, indicates that eloquence, debating capacity and oratory were also requirements for the councillor. All these conclusions are further attested by the *Atharva Veda* and some other later sources.

Preference for the wealthy members of the republic is also evident

<sup>1</sup> *RV*, viii, 4, 9.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, ii, 24, 13; *sabheyo vipro bharate matī dhanā*.

<sup>3</sup> *RV*, i, 167, 3; *sabhāvatī vidathyeva sam vāk*; cf. Geldner's tr.

<sup>4</sup> *RV* ii, 24, 13-15.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, iv, 2, 5; *iḷānān eṣo asura prajāvān dīrgho rayiḥ prṭhubudhnaḥ sabhāvān*.



in the Roman *comitia centuriata*,<sup>1</sup> and in a number of Greek oligarchies. In the Greek oligarchies based on wealth, this alone formed the "defining principle" of the constitution,<sup>2</sup> whereas it was only one of many factors in the Vedic *sabhā*-ruled tribal governments. The importance of landed property was emphasized in the early Greek constitutions. Solon's system of taking the yearly return of corn and oil into account is also indicative of a property qualification.<sup>3</sup> Some of the characteristics of the Greek oligarchy of the knights and of the hoplites are also noticeable in the Vedic *sabhā*.<sup>4</sup> The *sabhā* also had some of the features of an aristocracy based on birth and land, and some of an aristocracy of conquest.<sup>5</sup> The organization and the functions of the *sabhā* bring to mind the Icelandic republic where "all the free men were equal, while the power was in the hands of 39 local chieftains, called *godars* from their religious authority."<sup>6</sup> Halvdar Koht comments on the character and organization of the Vikings:

Here we come into contact with a powerful race of state-builders, nations endowed with a strong social instinct and at the same time exhibiting a force of individualism that makes us see the single man in his full personality. When asked for their chief, the Vikings of Rollo proudly answered: 'We have no chief, we are all equals.' In the same way the sagas of the north give the impression of a society made up of chiefs, of strong and independent individuals, and these men are not only warriors and wild barbarians, they are also jurists, refined poets, and artists.<sup>7</sup>

The qualities that made some Vikings leading men of their nation included strength, sense of justice, and ability to compose good poetry. It appears that the Vedic "councillors" had to a great extent these very qualities in common with the Vikings. The little commonwealth of Iceland manifested a "living unity and its *Althing* or General Court, established in the year 930 A.D. is today

<sup>1</sup> H.P. Harvey, *Oxford Companion to Classical Lit.*, p. 117; Heitland, *op. cit.*, i, pp. 46ff.

<sup>2</sup> Whibley, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 126ff.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 132ff.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 11ff; 117ff.

<sup>6</sup> *Chamber's Encyclopaedia*, s.v. Iceland; cf. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v.; A. J. Peaslee, *Constitutions of Nations*, ii, pp. 179-88.

<sup>7</sup> *CMH*, vi, p. 362.



beyond comparison the oldest national assembly of the world.”<sup>1</sup> This assembly, as we have noticed already, was composed of 39 members. We cannot, however, determine the exact number of people who sat in the Vedic *sabhā* and carried out the administration of their political community, but their number would probably be counted in terms of hundreds, rather than of thousands.

The word *sabhāvatī*, a derivative of *sabhā*, occurs in a Ṛg Vedic hymn.<sup>2</sup> Professor R. S. Sharma has taken it as an adjective of *yoṣā* (woman), implying that she was a member of the *sabhā*. Dr. Sharma comments that “in the *Ṛg Veda* there is only one reference indicating the connection of woman with the *sabhā*. She is described as worthy of going to the *sabhā*.”<sup>3</sup> He further comments that “there is nothing to show that she was connected with the *saṁiti*.” Even in respect of the *sabhā*, it can be inferred from the *Maitrāyaṇī Samhitā* that she ceased to attend it in later times.”<sup>4</sup> The line in the Ṛg Vedic verse containing the term *sabhāvatī*, which Professor Sharma interprets as the woman being “worthy of going to the *sabhā*” and that “the *yoṣā* went to the *vidatha*”, is as follows: *guhā carantī manuṣo na yoṣā sabhāvatī vidathyeva saṁ vāk*.<sup>5</sup> Geldner translates it as “heimlich mitkommend wie eines Menschen Weib,<sup>6</sup> von einem Zuhörerkreis<sup>7</sup> umgeben wie die gelehrte Rede.”<sup>8</sup> Sāyana takes the word *sabhāvatī* to mean “worthy” and as qualifying the word *vāk* (speech), not *yoṣā*,<sup>9</sup> while Griffith takes it to mean “eloquent” referring to speech (*vāk*). None of these scholars have taken *sabhāvatī* as an adjective of the woman (*yoṣā*) of the preceding *pāda*, but interpret it to mean “learned,” “worthy” or “eloquent”, qualifying the abstract noun “speech” (*vāk*).<sup>10</sup> The context of the verse clearly indicates that by a simile Rodasī, Lightning personi-

<sup>1</sup> CMH, vi, p. 370; cf. also Peaslee, *op. cit.*, pp. 179-88; F. Elliott and M. Summerskill, *A Dictionary of Politics*, pp. 143-4.

<sup>2</sup> RV, i, 167, 3; *mimyakṣa yeṣu sudhitā ghytācī hiraṇya nirṇiguparā na ṛṣṭiḥ/guhā carantī manuṣo na yoṣā sabhāvatī vidathyeva saṁ vāk*.

<sup>3</sup> *Pol. Ideas and Inst.*, p. 64.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 64-5; *Mait. Sam.*, vi, 7, 41.

<sup>5</sup> RV, i, 167, 3.

<sup>6</sup> “Wie eine menschliche Frau heimlich mit anderen Männern geht.”

<sup>7</sup> “Den Marut.” See Geldner’s note, RV, i, 167, 3.

<sup>8</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>9</sup> Comment on *sabhāvatī*; *sā yathā yajñasabhām prāpyā virbhavati tadvat. yadvā. vidathyā vedanārha vivadamānayorvāk. sā yathā sabhāvatī tadvat* (RV, ed. V.K. Rajavade *et. al.*).

<sup>10</sup> RV, tr. Griffith, i, 167, 3; cf. P. Thieme, *Vidatha.*, p. 49.



fied,<sup>1</sup> is here described as being "like a young woman or bride of a man going out secretly [with another man]; like courtly or refined speech in the congregation." Our rendering is encouraged by the interpretations of earlier Indologists, and confirmed by our consultations with Sanskritists. Thus, we find no evidence to contradict the conclusion that in this verse the term *sabhāvatī* does not refer to the woman being eligible for the *sabhā*, but simply alludes to refined or learned speech probably corresponding somewhat to the British constitutional phrase, the "parliamentary language," implying language suitable to be employed in the *sabhā*.

Even if we accept Professor Sharma's interpretation that a woman was worthy of the *sabhā*, it makes no good sense because she is referred to as "moving secretly" (*guhā carantī*), which seems to allude to a woman's promiscuous activities.<sup>2</sup> This weakens the case for making women eligible for the *sabhā*. Furthermore, one such doubtful reference is surely not sufficient to prove that women attended the *sabhā*. With regard to Professor Sharma's interpretation that the "woman went to the vidatha," we do not doubt that women were members of the congregation at sacrifices on religious rites, in which sense the word *vidatha* is mainly used in Vedic literature rather than as "the earliest folk-assembly of the Indo-Āryans." This term we discuss later.<sup>3</sup> But Professor Sharma misinterprets the verse in question to show that women attended the *sabhā* at the time when the *Ṛg Veda* was composed. We should not forget that references to the institution of the *sabhā* in the *Ṛg Veda* are found in the main body of the text. Moreover, the *Maitrāyaṇī Samhitā*, as Professor Sharma himself admits, makes it more than clear that women did not attend the *sabhā*. Furthermore, *sabhāvatī* occurs in the first *maṇḍala*, which is definitely of later composition and probably not far removed from the date of composition of the *Atharva Veda* and the *Maitrāyaṇī Samhitā*.<sup>4</sup>

Apart from the one passage cited by Professor Sharma from the *Maitrāyaṇī Samhitā* to show that the women had ceased to attend the *sabhā*, we have found another passage in the same text which confirms that conclusion.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, there is yet another verse in

<sup>1</sup> *Rodasī* singular, name of Lightning as wife of Rudra and companion of the Maruts; *cp.* Monier Williams, *op. cit.* s.v.

<sup>2</sup> Also see, L. Renou, *Religions in Ancient India*, p. 32.

<sup>3</sup> See below, pp. 62ff.

<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 64; *Mait. Sam.*, vi, 7, 41.

<sup>5</sup> *Mait. Sam.*, vi, 7, 4; *pumāṇsaḥ sabhāmyānti, na striyo.*



the *Atharva Veda* which also shows that women were never members of the *sabhā*. In this hymn a woman is afraid she might lose her husband who speaks in the *sabhā*: "I [the wife] am speaking, not thou [the husband]; in the council indeed do thou speak; mayest thou be mine wholly; mayest thou not make mention of other women."<sup>1</sup> This verse proves that women did not go to the *sabhā* and were afraid that they might be deprived of their husbands who were probably influential men in the council and coveted by other women. This evidence strengthens our interpretation of the word *sabhāvatī* as not referring to a "woman councillor," and supports our view that women were not allowed to attend the *sabhā* during the entire Vedic period.<sup>2</sup> Such an inferior position of women is not surprising in the patriarchal society of the Vedic Aryans. In Greece and Rome as well, women did not attend the *boule* or the senate.

We have referred already to the fact that a few references indicate that the term *sabhā* was also used as the meeting place or council-hall.<sup>3</sup> Our sources do not specifically mention what the *sabhā* actually discussed apart from the judicial matters indicated by some passages. There seem to have been at least two, and perhaps three, grades of members of the *sabhā*. All those qualified to sit in the council, and entitled to take part in the deliberations were called *sabhyas*. Words such as *sabhāga* and *sabhācara* indicate that the councillors went to the *sabhā* to participate in discussions.<sup>4</sup> Those *sabhyas* who sat at a jury to administer justice were called *sabhāsads*. The distinction between the *sabhyas* and the *sabhāsads* is evident from an Atharvan verse: "O thou of the council [*sabhya*], protect my council [*sabhām*] and [they] who are the council or the councillors [*sabhyāḥ*]; sitters in the council or assessors [*sabhāsadaḥ*]."<sup>5</sup> Another verse refers to the assessors of Yama's council.<sup>6</sup> One passage in the *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* also mentions the *sabhām*, the *sabhyāḥ*

<sup>1</sup> *AV*, vii, 39, 4; *aham adāmi nettvam sabhāyāmaha tvam vada/mamedasa-stvam kevalo nānyāsām kīrtayāścana.*; cf. *Vedic Index*, ii, p. 427.

<sup>2</sup> Bloomfield, on the basis of the *Mait. Sam.*, iv, 7, 4; 97, 15; *Ait. Br.*, iii, 24, 7; *Gopatha Br.*, ii, 3, 22, also held that women had nothing to do with the *sabhā* (*JAOS*, xix, p. 14).

<sup>3</sup> *RV*, viii, 4, 9; *AV*, xix, 55, 5; *Śat. Br.*, ii, 3, 2, 3; v, 3, 1, 10; *Chān. Up.*, v, 3, 6; viii, 14, 1, etc.

<sup>4</sup> *Śat. Br.*, iii, 3, 4, 14; *Jaim. Br.*, i, 22; *Chān. Up.*, v, 3, 6; *Mait. Sam.*, xxx, 6, etc.

<sup>5</sup> *AV*, xix, 55, 5.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, iii, 29, 1.



and the *sabhāsadaḥ* separately.<sup>1</sup> Yet, another passage in the same text gives the impression that the *sabhācaras* were connected with the *dharma* or Law as the *sūtas* with singing and the actors with performing.<sup>2</sup> In most cases the *sabhāsads* are distinguished from the ordinary councillors.

The council-hall was not only a place for political meetings and the dispensation of justice, but also the socio-religious centre of the community. A passage in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* refers to a fire being kept in the *sabhā*,<sup>3</sup> probably for the tribal fire-worship, while there are several references to the *sabhā*-hall being used for playing dice. A gamester in the *Ṛg Veda* approaches the *sabhā*-hall, wondering if he will be lucky at dice that day.<sup>4</sup> A *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* passage refers to the keeper of the gambling-hall as *sabhāvin*, and to a man who stays in the gambling-hall or at the gambling-table as "unmoved like a pillar", a constant gambler, or *sabhāsthānu*.<sup>5</sup> All these references make it quite clear that the *sabhā*-hall was a centre not only of political but of social and religious and other important activities as well.<sup>6</sup> Very much like the Icelandic *Althing* it also meted out justice. Although we have no definite evidence for the *sabhā* being a religious authority, it seems unlikely that among peoples of this stage of culture it had no religious function. The Vedic people were preoccupied with religious rites, ceremonies and worship of the gods. Therefore, it is impossible not to connect the *sabhā* with those functions believed to be of the utmost importance.<sup>7</sup>

The *sabhāpati*, or the president of the council, is referred to both in the *Vājasaneyī* and the *Taittirīya Samhitās*,<sup>8</sup> but we do not know for how long he was appointed. The pride shown by the friends of a debater might indicate a successful candidate for the presidency: "All friends rejoice in the friend who comes in triumph having conquered in the council."<sup>9</sup> "He is their blame-avertter, food-

<sup>1</sup> *Tait. Br.*, i, 2, 1, 26; *sapṛatha sabhām me gopāyayeca sabhyāḥ sabhāsadaḥ*.

<sup>2</sup> *Tait. Br.*, iii, 4, 21, 1; *gītāya sūtam nṛttāya śailūṣam dharmmāya sabhācaram*.

<sup>3</sup> *Śat. Br.*, ii, 3, 2, 3; *atha ya eṣa sabhāyāmagñiḥ*.

<sup>4</sup> *ṚV*, x, 34, 6; *sabhāmeti kitavaḥ pṛcchamāno jeṣyāmīti tanvā 3 śasujāna*.

<sup>5</sup> *Tait. Br.*, iii, 4, 16, 1; also see *Vāj. Sam.*, xxx, 18; *Mait. Sam.*, i, 6, 11.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Vedic Index*, ii, p. 426.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Hillebrandt, *op. cit.*, ii, pp. 123-5; *Vedic Index*, ii, p. 427.

<sup>8</sup> *Vāj. Sam.*, xvi, 24; *Tait. Sam.*, iv, 5, 3, 2.

<sup>9</sup> *ṚV*, x, 71, 10; *sarve nandanti yaśasāgatena sabhāsāhena sakhyā sakhāyaḥ*.



provider, prepared is he and fit for deeds of vigour.”<sup>1</sup> This may well refer to a successful candidate for the presidency, but it seems more probable that he was often successful in debates and was a good orator. Probably all the important members of the council, the assessors (*sabhāsads*) and the president (*sabhāpati*) held their offices for life. They decided upon questions of war and peace, they administered justice, and they performed religious rites on behalf of the political community.

A verse in the *Vājasaneyī Samhitā* shows the manner in which a speaker addressed the *sabhā*: “I salute the councillors, I bow down to the president,”<sup>2</sup> while in another hymn of the same text a man performs a ceremony to obtain the pardon of the gods for the wrongs he has done “in the village, in the forest and in the *sabhā*.”<sup>3</sup> This might suggest that at times wrong judgements were given in the *sabhā*, causing a feeling of guilt in the heart of a *sabhāsad* or “assessor.”

#### *Government of the Sabhā and the Samiti*

There are at least 25 mentions of the *sabhā* and 19 references to the *samiti* in the *Ṛg Veda* and *Atharva Veda* alone. In the majority of the cases these occur in separate hymns. There is not a single instance of the *sabhā* and the *samiti* occurring together in the *Ṛg Veda Samhitā*, whereas they occur together in the hymns and verses in the Atharvan collection at least four times.<sup>4</sup> The number of their joint occurrences is few indeed, but they are of considerable significance, if examined carefully. (The significant fact of these joint references occurring only in the later layers of the Vedic hymns points to the relative chronology of the origin and development of the *sabhā* and *samiti* as political institutions.)

We have already suggested that in some non-monarchical tribal governments only the *sabhā* ruled and that it was a form of aristocracy. (Here we shall attempt to show that there were some political communities which had no king, but had a *sabhā*, as discussed above, and also a *samiti* or a larger assembly which probably consisted of all the heads of families of the community.)

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, 2nd line; *kilbiṣaspr̥t pituṣanirhyeṣā-maram hito bhavati vājināya*.

<sup>2</sup> *Vāj. Sam.*, xvi, 24; *namaḥ sabhābhyaḥ sabhāpatibhyaśca vo namo*.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, iii, 45; *yadgrāme yadarāṇye yatsabhāyām yadindriye, / yadena-ścakṛmā vayāmidam tadavayajāmahe svāhā*; also at xx, 17.

<sup>4</sup> *AV*, vii, 13, 1; viii, 10, 8-11; xii, 1, 56; xv, 9, 1-3.



The fact that the *samiti* appears chiefly in the tenth *maṇḍala* of the *Ṛg Veda* is of great importance. In our opinion it supports the late origin of the *samiti*, and this time factor is of considerable importance in the study of the development and inter-relations of political institutions. We further suggest that the *samiti* developed into an independent political institution, distinct from the archaic Vedic *viś* which chose the king, on almost similar lines as the evolution of the earlier Roman *patres-familias* into the Senate during the republican period; and as the Homeric *gerousia* changed into the Athenian *ecclesia*.<sup>1</sup>

It seems probable that the previous practice of choosing the king by the heads of families ceased to exist in some political communities, and the ruling power fell into the hands of an aristocracy. In others, however, the body of the heads of families of the *viś*, which used to choose the king, developed into the *samiti* and ruled in conjunction with the *sabhā*. These are hypotheses on the origin and inter-relation of the *viś*, the institution of elective kingship, and the *sabhā* and *samiti*. (The *Atharva Veda* clearly indicates that the *sabhā* and *samiti* sometimes existed together in the same tribe. This, together with the appearance of the *samiti* only in the later strata of the Vedic literature, apparently indicates the development of a new form of non-monarchical tribal government.)

The main evidence to support this theory comes from some Atharvan hymns which are quoted and discussed below:

1. Let both the council [*sabhā*] and the assembly [*samiti*], the two daughters of Prajāpati, accordant, favour me; may he with whom I shall come together, desire to aid me, may I speak what is pleasant among those who have come together, O Fathers.<sup>2</sup>

This is the first verse of a hymn addressed to Śaunaka asking for success in the assembly and contains at least seven significant points.

- a. It unmistakably shows that the *sabhā* and the *samiti* both existed in the same tribe.
- b. It shows that both had powers to deliberate on matters of

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Ludwig, *RV*, iii, 253ff.

<sup>2</sup> *AV*, vii, 13, 1; *sabhā ca mā samitiścāvatām prajāpaterduhitarao samvidāne / yenā saṁgacchā upa mā sa śikṣāñcāru vadāni pitarḥ saṁgateṣu*. Whitney takes *sabhā* as an "assembly" and *samiti* as "gathering" (*AV*, HOS edn.). Also found in the Kashmirian *AV*, xx; *Kaṣika Sūtra* of the *AV*, 38, 27.



importance, since both are called the daughters of Prajāpati, the Father of gods.

c. It suggests that sometimes both met together.

d. It proves that a person who attended the *sabhā* could also attend the *samiti* and naturally attended the joint sessions of the *sabhā* and *samiti*.

e. The wish that both may be in accord points to the fact that there sometimes was disagreement between the two bodies.

f. It shows that a speaker had to be polite and pleasant in order to win the favour of those who attended the meetings.

g. The fact that the *sabhā* precedes the *samiti* is also noteworthy. In fact, in all the joint occurrences the *sabhā* is always mentioned first, thus indicating the power and the prestige enjoyed by the *sabhā* above the *samiti*.

The second verse of the same hymn ignores the *samiti* and refers only to the *sabhā* and the *sabhāsads*, or assessors. We have already considered this verse in connection with the administration of justice and that often there were disagreements among the councillors.

We know thy name O council (*sabhe*)  
verily merriment [or sport, *nariṣṭā*] by name art thou;  
whoever are thy assessors (*sabhāsads*), let them be of like  
speech with me.<sup>1</sup>

The occurrence of *sabhā* alone in this passage points to the independent existence of these two institutions and also shows that in the tribal governments where the *sabhā* and *samiti* both existed, the former was the principal body, but was assisted by the *samiti*. The fact that both verses occur also in the Kashmirian *Atharva Veda*<sup>2</sup> and the *Kauśika Sūtra* of the *Atharva Veda*<sup>3</sup> increases the strength of the theory that both *sabhā* and *samiti* sometimes existed in the same tribe and thus supports our interpretation.

2. He moved out towards the tribes [*viśonu*].

After him moved out the council [*sabhā*] and the assembly [*samiti*], and the strong drink.

<sup>1</sup> *AV*, vii, 13, 2; *nariṣṭā* seems obscure. Perhaps it refers to the *sabhā*-hall with respect to dicing, etc., indicating the *sabhā*'s role as a centre of social activities for the community.

<sup>2</sup> Kashmirian *AV*, xx.

<sup>3</sup> *Kauśika Sūtra*, 38, 27.



Verily both of the council and of the assembly and of the army and of the strong drink doth he become the dear abode who knoweth thus.<sup>1</sup>

This hymn confirms our view about the distinction between the *sabhā* and the *samiti*, and the placing of the *sabhā* first shows its prime importance in the body-politic. This hymn also confirms the point that not all the people were entitled to attend the *samiti*. If the personnel of both were identical there would be little point in mentioning them separately, or the army (*senā*), which follows *sabhā* and the *samiti*. This hymn shows that these three—the *sabhā*, *samiti* and *senā*—were the three most important institutions in such political communities. Their respective numerical strength was probably in the following order. Firstly, all able-bodied male members of the tribe composed the army. Secondly, the heads of families could attend the *samiti* and had full rights of free-citizens as in the *viś*, the archaic body of heads of families from which the *samiti* probably developed. Thirdly, the *sabhā*, the composition and function of which we have already discussed at length, consisted of the most important, strong, wealthy and influential tribesmen.<sup>2</sup>)

This hymn, like the one quoted before it, does not mention a king. The *sabhā*, *samiti*, and *senā* are mentioned, but the king does not figure in these contexts. This evidence indicates that no kings existed in those political communities where the *sabhā* and the *samiti* jointly administered the public business. These forms of tribal governments were more positively republican than the previous ones.

3. Whatever villages, whatever forest, whatever councils [*sabhā*] [are] upon the earth;  
 Whatever gatherings [*saṅgrāmāḥ*], assemblies [*samitayah*]—  
 in them we may speak what is pleasant to thee [Earth].<sup>3</sup>

This hymn is addressed to the Earth and refers to both the *sabhā* and the *samiti*, but there is not a single mention of a *rājā* or king in this long hymn of 63 verses. The hymn is very significant and strengthens the view that the *sabhā-samiti* political communities were republics. It appears to be the composition of a republican who prayed to the Earth to set his people free from rivals (verse 41),

<sup>1</sup> *AV*, xv, 9, 1-3.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. above, pp. 34ff.

<sup>3</sup> *AV*, xii, 1, 56.

and the allusion to the Earth's "abandoning god-insulting barbarians" (verse 37) indicates the confidence and establishment of Vedic Culture. These people praise the heroes (verse 25) and wish not to be hated by anyone (verses 18, 23, 24). This seems to contain a plea for peaceful co-existence with neighbouring tribes. They prize the "honey of speech" (verse 16) and verse 11 states that the singer had stood upon the earth "unharrassed, unsmitten, unwounded. . .", indicative of a republic at peace. He seeks "brilliancy, strength and the highest position in the realm."<sup>1</sup> The reference to the "abandoning of the god-insulting barbarians" also points to a period when the Vedic people had already established themselves. Thus, it seems to fit in with the suggestion that the *sabhā-samiti* type of government developed out of the earlier political communities governed by "popular" monarchy.

4. She [*Virāj*] ascended;  
 she descended in the council [*sabhā*]: men go to this  
 council [*sabhā*], worthy of council [*sabhya*] becometh  
 he who knoweth thus.

She ascended;  
 she descended in the assembly [*samiti*]: men go to this  
 assembly [*samiti*], worthy of assembly [*sāmitya*] be-  
 cometh he who knoweth thus.<sup>2</sup>

This hymn is addressed to *Virāj*, the personification of power and sovereignty.<sup>3</sup> The opening words clearly point to this interpretation: "*Virāj* verily was this [universe]; of her when born everything was afraid . . .".<sup>4</sup> The following verses indicate the growth of civilization through family life and sacrifice to the gods, and then the *sabhā* and *samiti* are mentioned. This hymn seems to reveal that the composers did not know of any other form of government. The hymn is equally important in showing that there was no king in this type of constitution. Here again the *sabhā* and the *sabhya* have precedence over the *samiti* and the *sāmitya*.

The main characteristics of these tribal governments can briefly be summarized from the evidence we have discussed. They were republican governments and were comparatively more democratic; their appearance on the scene politically indicated a

<sup>1</sup> *AV*, xii, 1, 8; *balam rāṣṭre dadhātūtame*.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, viii, 10, 8-11.

<sup>3</sup> Monier Williams, s.v. *Virāj*. "*Virāj* is spoken of as a female, and regarded as a cow. . . ."

<sup>4</sup> *AV*, viii, 10, 1.



development in the popular institutions of the *sabhā* and the *samiti*. (The *sabhā* and the *samiti* were two distinct institutions,<sup>1</sup> the former being the central supreme power composed of important members of the tribe, whereas the latter represented the entire free population through the heads of families who did not always attend all the meetings.) Presumably the *sabhyas* were automatically also members of the *samiti* (*sāmitya*). We further notice that joint-sessions of the *sabhā* and the *samiti* were sometimes held; at the sessions members employed such language and manners as would please and win favour in the assembly. However, there was also disagreement and discord within the *sabhā* and the *samiti*.

A striking feature of these republics appears to be their self-confidence and desire to live in peace with their neighbours, which is just the contrary of what we learn about the republics at the time of the Buddha and Mahāvira. Yet in such turbulent times it seems hardly possible that peace could have been looked upon as being in any way normal or permanently desirable. Hence it seems that the citizens wished merely to be recognized and to win over people with their pleasing speeches and polite manners, in order to attain "brilliancy, strength and the highest position" in the republic, which were not hereditary.

We have already discussed the power and the function of the *sabhā* in the earlier period,<sup>2</sup> and the same is applicable to the *sabhā* of these republics with the slight change that here the *samiti* existed as a check on the *sabhā*. Yet the latter still wielded the supreme power, but in grave crises it probably could not ignore the voice of the people as reflected in the *samiti*. Theoretically the ultimate authority was probably vested in the hands of the *samiti*, but in actual practice it found its manifestation and implementation through the *sabhā*. Apart from this change of situation, the position of the *sabhā* remained unaltered. We know far less about the assembly of these republics, though where there is evidence about the *samiti* it appears to refer to another type of constitution to be discussed next.

(The *sabhā* and the *samiti* of these Vedic republics bear a striking similarity in power, position, functions and composition to the) ✕

<sup>1</sup> This investigation seems to show that the views held by Zimmer, Hillebrandt, Bloomfield, Whitney, Majumdar, Jayaswal and others are erroneous; cf. *Vedic Index*, s.v. *sabhā*, *samiti*.

<sup>2</sup> See above, pp. 32ff.



Roman Senate and *comitia* of the republican period. The *sabhā* further resembles the *boule* of the Greek city-states though it was comparatively dissimilar to the Athenian *boule*, which elected its members each year, whereas the *sabhyas* appear to have held office for life. The *samiti* had its counterpart not only in the Roman Senate, but also in the Athenian *ecclesia* and the assemblies of other Greek republics with the exception of Sparta. We cannot carry these parallels too far as we know comparatively little of the Vedic *sabhā* and *samiti*. The rarity and obscurity of the references, especially in later Vedic texts indicate that democratic principles, political philosophy and republican institutions did not inspire the Indian mind as they did that of their western cousins.

#### Government of the Rājās and the Samiti

Another variety of non-monarchical government found during the Vedic period is one in which the nobles (*rājās*) appear to have been the leaders of the political community, and to have ruled in collaboration with the *samiti*. Our main grounds for this assertion are the references to the *samiti* and the kings meeting in the *samiti* in some Ṛg Vedic hymns,<sup>1</sup> the references to "kings" or rather "nobles" in the Ṛg Veda, Atharva Veda and some other sources, and the mention of the *samiti* in the Atharva Veda where the *sabhā* does not figure with it.<sup>2</sup>

There are a number of passages in the Vedic literature where the word *rājan* occurs in the plural and has the connotation of "nobles" or "chiefs" rather than kings.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, there are some mentions of the "nobles" in relation to the *samiti*, while the *samiti* sometimes figures independently of the *sabhā*, mainly in the Atharva Veda where it is only connected with the *sabhā* in four hymns.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the independent occurrences of the word *samiti* in the Vedic literature and its relation with the *rājās*, or "nobles", give evidence of a different type of non-monarchical constitution.

→ It stands out from the three main types of non-monarchical

<sup>1</sup> ṚV, x, 97; ix, 92, 6, etc.

<sup>2</sup> AV, v, 19, 15; vi, 64, 2; 88, 3; xii, 3, 46, 52; xviii, 2, 56.

<sup>3</sup> Prof. N. G. Chapekar goes even further and says: "It is erroneous to attribute the sense of governing to this word as used in the Ṛg Veda. . . *Rājan* means; one that shines" and he concludes that "the *rājās* are primarily gods and secondarily all those who are participants in the sacrificial rites intended to propitiate the gods." p. (228); see *JIH*, 42, 1964, pt. 1, pp. 219-28.

<sup>4</sup> AV, vii, 13, 1; viii, 10, 8-11; xii, 1, 56; xv, 9, 1-3.



government in several respects. (It differs from the popular monarchical tribal governments because it contains more than one king who owe their positions not to the choice of the people, but probably by virtue of possessing the same qualities by which the chosen king was qualified for, or entitled to, his chieftaincy. Here the rulers were many, whereas in the tribes whose king was chosen by the heads of families, there was only one. In addition, in this type the *samiti* existed as an independent, distinct and powerful political institution, whereas in the elective monarchies there was only the undefined and amorphous body of the *viś*—an archaic assembly of earlier times in its nature, composition and functions. Furthermore, it appears probable that in the political communities governed by nobles and *samiti*, the sons of the nobles replaced their fathers after their deaths, whereas the son of the king in the popular monarchies had no such right to the throne.

[ This type was also different from the *sabhā*-ruled aristocracies in the sense that it had no *sabhā* and the college of nobles constituted the council. The *sabhā*-ruled government contained mainly aristocratic-oligarchic elements, whereas this variety had both aristocratic and democratic or popular institutions; the council of nobles formed the aristocratic element and the *samiti* the democratic. The *samiti* was common to both the present variety and the *sabhā-samiti* republics, but it would seem that its role in the former was more important. The “nobles” of this type of government must have played more or less the role of the *sabhā*, but probably the college of nobles was smaller in size than the *sabhā* )

The following are the passages where the word *rājānaḥ* is used in the sense of “nobles” or “chiefs”:

1. He [Indra] amplifies his lordly might, with nobles [*rājabhiḥ*] he slays: even mid alarms he dwells secure.  
In great or lesser fight none checks him, none subdues the wielder of the thunderbolt.<sup>1</sup>
2. O much-invoked [Indra], may we subdue all famine and evil want with store of grain and cattle.  
May we allied, as first in rank, with nobles [*rājabhiḥ*] obtain possessions by our own exertion.<sup>2</sup>
3. He who has a store of herbs at hand like nobles [*rājānaḥ*] in the assembly [*samitau*].

<sup>1</sup> *RV*, i, 40, 8; also see *RV*, i, 108, 7; *rājani* for noble or *kṣatriya*.

<sup>2</sup> *RV*, x, 42, 10; *vayam rājabhiḥ prathamā dhanānyasmā-kena vṛjanenā jayema*. The same verse is repeated at *ibid.*, 43, 10; 44, 10.



Physician is that sage's name who slays the devil, and chases disease away.<sup>1</sup>

4. Take hold of thine own dominion [*kṣatra*], Agni; with [thy] friend Agni, strive in friendly wise; [as one] of midmost station among [his] fellows [*sajātā*], [as one] to be severally invoked of nobles [*rājñām*], Agni shine thou here.<sup>2</sup>
5. When the nobles [*rājāno*] share among themselves the remainder of wealth the sixteenth part of which has been offered and bestowed on Yama [as sacrifice]—ye, assessors of Yama: after the offering of the white-footed sheep, given [as] ancestral offering, Yama releases [us from the tax].<sup>3</sup>
6. Make thou me dear to the gods, make me dear amongst the nobles [*rājasu*], dear to everything that sees, both to the Śūdra and to the Ārya.<sup>4</sup>
7. Bestow splendour on our Brāhmaṇas, bestow splendour on our nobles [*rājasu*]; bestow splendour on the Vaiśya, . . . Śūdras and on me.<sup>5</sup>
8. Just as I speak in endearing terms to people, to Brāhmaṇas, nobles [*rājanya*], Śūdras, Āryans, and even to my deadly foe, so may I become dear to the gods, to the bestower of gifts; may my desire be fulfilled, and may I realize this.<sup>6</sup>

Noteworthy points to be gathered from the above quotations are that the word *rājan* here occurs in the plural, presumably signifying a college of rulers or nobles; in the *Ṛg Veda* it occurs in this sense at least six times and in each case in the first and the tenth *maṇḍalas* in which *saṁiti* also occurs. In later texts the word becomes synonymous with the *rājanya* or *kṣatriya*, the ruling class and there is a constant emphasis on the people's trying to endear themselves to their noble rulers.

We now quote all the passages where *saṁiti* occurs independently of the *sabhā* in the *Ṛg Veda* and the *Atharva Veda*. It will be noted that in many of them the *saṁiti* and the *rājās* both occur in the same verse or that the word "nobles" occurs in almost all the hymns where the *saṁiti* is mentioned:

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, x, 97, 6; *yatrauṣadhiḥ samagmata rājānaḥ samitāviva/vipraḥ sa ucyate bhiṣag rakṣohāmivacātanah*.

<sup>2</sup> *AV*, ii, 6, 4; *sajātānām madhyameṣṭhā rājñāmagne vihuyo didihīha*.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, iii, 29, 1; *yadrājāno vibhajanta*; *rājāno* also at iii, 5, 7; cf. *AV*, tr. Griffith, iii, 29, 1; fn. 1.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, xix, 62, 1; *priyam mā kṛṇu deveṣu priyam rājasu mā kṛṇu*; cp. *RV*, x, 128; also see, Bandhu, *RV Word-Index*, pp. 444-45; Bandhu, *AV Alph. Index*, pp. 235-36.

<sup>5</sup> *Tait. Sam.*, v, 7, 6, 4; *Vāj. Sam.*, 18, 48.

<sup>6</sup> *Tait. Sam.*, i, 3, 6; *Vāj. Sam.*, 26, 2; *Kṛṣṇa YV*, i, 3, 6.



1. He who has a store of herbs at hand like the nobles [*rājānaḥ*] in the assembly [*samitau*].

Physician is that sage's name who slays the devil, and chases disease away.<sup>1</sup>

This verse unmistakably shows that the ruling nobles met in the assembly and were collectively called *rājās*. It does not necessarily mean that all those gathered in the assembly were called *rājās*; all the members of the *samiti* were designated as *sāmityas*.<sup>2</sup> Apart from this verse, the word *rājan* occurs at least four times in the hymn and significantly the word *viś* is not mentioned here at all. This indicates clearly that the *samiti* had crystallized as a political institution from the *viś* of the popular monarchies in the communities where the *samiti* and the "nobles" exercised the supreme power and formed a special type of non-monarchical government.

2. As the priest seeks the house rich in cattle, like a true king [*rājā*] who goes to the assembly [*samiti*].

Soma has sought the beakers while they cleansed him, and like a wild bull, in the wood has settled.<sup>3</sup>

This implies that the king derived maintenance from the *samiti* as the priest from the rich man and the bull from the woods. It is also not impossible that here *samiti* has its later meaning of "battle."<sup>4</sup> Verse 5 indicates that the people greatly respected those who provided them with protection and repelled the *dasyus*. This hymn also strengthens our view that the "nobles" and the *samiti* existed side by side in this type of non-monarchical government and that unconscientious nobles often missed the sessions of the assembly. In this hymn the word *viś* does not figure, but the *jana* or "tribe" occurs, probably indicative of a larger community than that implied by the *viś*, "clan."<sup>5</sup> Those tribal governments which had a more complicated political machinery probably ruled over a larger territory,<sup>6</sup> and (this was definitely a more refined and elaborate type of government than had existed in the earlier popular monarchies.)

<sup>1</sup> *RV*, x, 97, 6; *rājānaḥ samitāviva*; also see i, 41, 3.

<sup>2</sup> *AV*, viii, 10, 11; *yantyaśya samitim sāmityo bhavati ya evam veda*.

<sup>3</sup> *RV*, ix, 92, 6; *rājā na satyaḥ samitiriyānaḥ*.

<sup>4</sup> *Bhagavadgītā*, ed. and tr. S. Radhakrishnan, i, 8, where Arjuna, Bhīṣma, Karna, Kṛpa, etc. are called *samitimjayah*, "ever victorious in battle."

<sup>5</sup> *CHI*, i, pp. 91ff; Zimmer, *op. cit.*, pp. 159ff; M. Geiger, *Ostiranische Kultur*, p. 427.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Lucy Mair, *op. cit.*, pp. 22ff.



3. He (Agni) makes him a most noble form of splendour, decking him in his home with milk as well as waters. The sage adorns the depths of air with wisdom: this is the assembly (*samiti*) where the gods are worshipped.<sup>1</sup>

This hymn also does not mention *viś*, but only *samiti* alone, and it further shows that the *samiti* also performed the religious function of worshipping the gods to bring good luck to the tribe as a whole.

4. When the holy Agni is [alight], the assembly [*samiti*] is gathered, and the gods perform the holy rites. And when thou, godlike one, deal forth treasures, vouchsafe us too our portion of the riches.<sup>2</sup>

This verse is not very clear, but it appears to mean that when the assembly met they worshipped the Fire-god. Thus, the *samiti* here also is connected with religious functions, but the prayer for the "portion of the riches" in this context might suggest that at some sessions of the assembly the spoils collected in war were distributed among the members after the fire-worship.

5. Hither I came as conqueror with mighty all-effecting power. And I have mastered all your minds, your resolutions, your assembly [*samiti*]. May I be highest [*uttama*], having gained your strength in war, your skill in peace; my feet have trodden on your heads. Speak to me from beneath my feet, as frogs from out the water croak.<sup>3</sup>

This is a very significant hymn. Here one of the nobles expects the assembly members to pay him respect as he has great power, and in the third verse he prays to the Lord of Speech, Vācaspati, that his rivals may speak to him humbly. Moreover, in the first verse he prays, "make me a bull among my peers, make me my rivals' conqueror. Make me slayer of my foes, a sovereign ruler, lord of kine."<sup>4</sup> The hymn is intended for the subduing of rival nobles and the speaker wishes to be a *virāj*, a king of kings(?).

This hymn also indicates that among the ruling nobles there was a struggle for supreme power. Such tendencies brought about another stage in the development of these aristocracies and they

<sup>1</sup> *RV*, i, 95, 8; *sā devatātā samitirbabhūva*.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, x, 11, 8; *yadagna eṣā samitirbhavāti*.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 166, 4-5.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, verse 1; *ṛṣabham mā samānānām sapatnānām viśāsahim/hantāram śatrūṇām kṛdhi virājam gopatim gavām*.



soon became monarchies. } The speaker wishes to be the bull among his equals (*samānānām*) and rivals (*sapatnānām*) who formed the ruling-college and often met in the assembly (*samiti*). He has distinguished himself in war and now wishes to utilize his military success to gain political power over his fellow nobles. He seeks their support in war and needs their skill in peace-time, probably to assist him in running the government. The word *virāj* probably refers here to the head of the college of nobles. The speaker wishes to become a *virāj*, implying thereby a monarch in his own right like the kings of hereditary monarchies. It is likely that these tribal governments had a chief ruler who was the most powerful and most respected and feared in the college of rulers and the *samiti*. As chief of the council of nobles he might, in the long run, insist on their appointing his son to succeed him.

6. Thou, mighty Agni, gatherest all that is precious for thy friend.

Bring us all treasures as thou art enkindled in the place of libations.

Assemble, speak together: let your minds be all of one accord; As ancient gods unanimous sit down to their appointed share.

Uniform be your councils, identical be the assembly [*samiti*], alike be your minds, so be their thoughts united.

A common purpose do I lay before you, and worship with your general oblations.

One and the same be your resolve, and be your minds of one accord.

United be the thoughts of all that all may happily agree.<sup>1</sup>

This R̥g Vedic hymn prays for concord in the assembly. The concord sought in council, resolve and worship, indicates that there was often much discord and disagreement in the assembly. This hymn also implies that the *samiti* also offered worship to the Fire for the good fortune of the entire tribe.

The word *samiti* also occurs in the Atharvan hymns at least six times independently of the *sabhā* and mostly in relation to the nobles:

7. The rain of Mitra and Varuṇa does not fall upon the Brāhmaṇa-scather;  
the assembly (*samiti*) does not suit him;  
he wins no friends to his control.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> R̥V, x, 191, 2-4; *samāno mantrah samitiḥ samānī samānam manah*. . . ; found also in AV, vi, 64, 2; Mait. Sam., ii, 2, 6; Tait. Br., ii, 4, 4.

<sup>2</sup> AV, v, 19, 15; *nāsmāi samitiḥ kalpate na mitram nayate vaśam*.

This is a hymn which a Brāhmaṇa utters after losing his cow. The word *rājan* occurs twice in the hymn, in one instance with reference to Varuṇa. The verse seems to imply that the *samiti* favoured those nobles who did not trouble the Brāhmaṇas, thus indicating growing Brāhmaṇic influence and the power of the *samiti* in the political community. The relation of the “nobles” and the *samiti* is significant and supports our view of a new form of non-monarchical government. The word *viś* does not occur in this hymn, but *rāṣṭra*, “country,” does. It suggests that this form of government might have had a territorial sense and controlled a larger territory and greater population.<sup>1</sup>

8. Fixed, unmoved, do thou slaughter the foes;  
make them that play the foe fall below [thee];  
[be] all the quarters likeminded, concordant;  
let the assembly [*samiti*] here suit thee [the noble who art]  
fixed.<sup>2</sup>

In this hymn both *samiti* and *rājā* occur, but not *sabhā*. Jayaswal has taken this to support his theory of election, but it has nothing to do with the choice of the king. It simply reveals that in this type of tribal government a powerful *samiti* existed beside the king. The singular here may refer to the head of the ruling college, and the word *rāṣṭra* occurs again.

9. I yoke for thee these two conveyers to convey thee to the  
other life; with them to Yama's seat, as to the assemblies  
[*samitiḥ*] thou dost go.<sup>3</sup>

The hymn refers to Yama as king and to the *samiti*. Verse 9 refers to the strength and youthful career of the man who died and was conveyed to Yama. He was of advanced years at the time of his death, “clothing himself in age”, *āyurvasāna*, (verse 10). There are several references to contests among rivals in this long hymn. The man who died appears to have been an important member of the assembly. Another verse indicates that he was powerful man of the tribe, and might even have been the chief of the nobles: “Taking the rod [*daṇḍa*] from the hand of the deceased man together with splendour and strength, thou just there [in Yama's dominion] here [in our tribe] may we be rich in heroes, conquer all

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Lucy Mair, *op. cit.*, pp. 14ff.

<sup>2</sup> *AV*, vi, 88, 3; also *cp.* *RV*, x, 173, 4-5.

<sup>3</sup> *AV*, xviii, 2, 56; *tābhyām yamasya sādānam samitiścava-gacchatāt*.



scorners and evil-plotters" (verse 59). The implication seems to be that this man was the chief of the nobles and devoted much of his time to subduing those indigenous hostile peoples who still scorned the Aryan way of life and plotted against them.

10. Taking the bow from the hand of the dead man, together with the authority [*kṣatra*], splendour, strength—take thou hold upon much prosperous good; come thou hitherward unto the world of the living.<sup>1</sup>

The last two verses of the hymn are unique in their contents. They refer to what appear to be royal insignia, the rod (*danda*) and the bow (*dhanus*), and the ruling authority (*kṣatra*), which are passed on to the succeeding chief. This testifies that the deceased man was the chief of the ruling college and that he held office for life. The existence of the *samiti* in the same tribe is attested by verse 56. We find no mention of the *sabhā* in this long hymn. Hence the "nobles" and the *samiti* alone formed this type of non-monarchical government.

11. Unto truth, unto penance, and unto the deities, we deliver this deposit [*nidhi*], [the] treasure; let it not be lost in our playing dice, or in the assembly [*samiti*]; do not release it to another in preference to me.<sup>2</sup> What [untruth] thou shalt speak at the dice, . . . in the assembly [*samityām*], or what untruth . . . from desire of gain,—clothing thyself in the web of authority [*kṣatra-tantu*], ye shall settle in it all pollutions.<sup>3</sup>

This long hymn of 60 verses is about the cremation ceremony, and contains at least seven mentions of the word *adhipati*, "ruler," in connection with different gods.<sup>4</sup> In one verse it refers to *rājyam* or the supreme ruling authority (Soma surpassing it, verse 31). The word is obscure but it might suggest that at that time the people understood that the "ruling authority" was different from those who exercised that authority, i.e., the government, thus vaguely recognizing a distinction between sovereignty and sovereign. Another important mention is of "treasure-keepers" (*nidhipā*) in at least three verses.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the combination of the two mentions

<sup>1</sup> *AV*, xviii, 2, 60; *dhanurhastādādādāno mṛtasya saha kṣatreṇa varca sā balena*.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, xii, 3, 46; *mā no dyūteva gānmā samityām mā. . . .*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, verse 52; *yadākṣeṣu vadā yat samityām. . . .*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, verses 55-60.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, verses 34, 41-2.



of the *samiti* and the seven references to kings again supports our view of a special form of constitution. We are not definite as to who and how many were these "treasure-keepers," but they possibly guarded the grain, cattle, and other property of the rulers collected as tax or maintenance allowance from the people of the tribe for the services which the nobles in the assembly rendered to the community. Two out of the three verses refer to the "treasure-keepers" thus: "In sixty autumns may we seek to gain heavenly light by cooked oblations."<sup>1</sup> The implication of "sixty autumns" is not clear.<sup>2</sup>

Apart from the above mentions of the *samiti*, the *Chândogya Upaniṣad* refers to Śvetaketu Āruṇeya's going to the *samiti* of the Pāñcālas,<sup>3</sup> but the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, recording the same event, replaces the word with *pariṣad*.<sup>4</sup> Here the *samiti* and the *pariṣad* are equated and refer to the king's council rather than to an "assembly." The *samiti* during the later Vedic period acquired this connotation. *Samiti* occurs at another place in the latter text in the sense of an academy: "He who wishes that a son should be born to him, who would be a reputed scholar [*paṇḍito vigītaḥ*] frequenting the assemblies [*samitim-gamaḥ*] and speaking delightful words, should study all the Vedas, etc. . . .,"<sup>5</sup> while in the *Mahābhārata* the word occurs in the sense of a "battle" (*samitim-jayaḥ*), a designation applied to Arjuna, Bhīṣma, Karna, Kṛpa, etc.<sup>6</sup>

All these later references indicate a further development in the institution of the *samiti*. In the Brāhmaṇic period it was being replaced by the *pariṣad*, a king's council of the learned *paṇḍits*. The word (*samiti*) is not used in the Vedic literature in the sense of "battle."<sup>7</sup> It always signified a "getting-together," an "assembly," "meeting" or a "council."<sup>8</sup> As far as we know, in the sense of a "battle" it occurs for the first time in the *Mahābhārata*. Eventually

<sup>1</sup> *AV*, xii, verses 34 and 41; *ṣaṣṭyām śaratsu nidhipā abhicchāt*.

<sup>2</sup> Griffith suggests that the "treasure-guardian" apparently meant "the master of the house who in sixty autumns more will have reached the natural term of his life" (See on *AV*, xii, 3, 34).

<sup>3</sup> *Chān. Up.*, (SB Hedn.), v, 3, 1; *śvetaketurhāruṇeyaḥ Pāñcālānam samiti-me yāya*.

<sup>4</sup> *Br. Up.*, (Poona edn.), vi, 2, 1; *pariṣadamājagāma*.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, vi, 4, 18.

<sup>6</sup> *Bhagavadgītā*, i, 18.

<sup>7</sup> *RV*, ix, 92, 6; cf. above, pp. 52ff; can be inferred but is very doubtful.

<sup>8</sup> Monier Williams, *op. cit.*, s.v. *Samiti*.



*samiti* came to mean an association or a society and it is in this sense alone that the word is used in modern Indian languages.

From the above data an outline of this type of constitution can be drawn, though we are unable to give full details. But this bare skeleton might inspire further research in order to add the flesh and blood required to complement the elements which it now lacks.

In one verse of the *R̥g Veda*,<sup>1</sup> already quoted above, where a noble is referred to as superior to the other nobles and rivals, Zimmer sees evidence that in times of peace there was no one king in some states, but members of the royal family held equal rights. He compares this with the state of affairs in early Germany.<sup>2</sup> This view is untenable. The passages used by Zimmer only indicate that among the nobles one was the chief. No one family held royal rights in these tribal governments. Moreover, the *R̥g Vedic* passage merely shows that all the nobles who sat with the assembly could be called *rājās*, and is not decisive for the sense ascribed to it by Zimmer.<sup>3</sup> This state of affairs is comparable to that of early Germany as described by Tacitus.<sup>4</sup>

The passages referring to the nobles (*rājānah*) indicate beyond a doubt that in some tribal governments a college of nobles ruled.<sup>5</sup> The relation between the nobles and the *samiti* is further manifested by the verses which mention that the nobles met in the assembly to discuss what appear to have been important matters of administration.<sup>6</sup> Some hymns also indicate that the assembly performed religious rites to secure the favour of the gods as well, on behalf of the tribe. This function must have been very significant at the time as the Vedic people were preoccupied with religion. Some hymns clearly show that the *samiti* possessed considerable power as well.<sup>7</sup> We also notice that there was often discord among the nobles of the ruling college and the members of the *samiti*,<sup>8</sup> that there was a constant struggle among the nobles

<sup>1</sup> *RV*, x, 97, 6.

<sup>2</sup> Zimmer, *op. cit.*, pp. 176ff. He also compares *AV*, i, 9; iii, 4; iv, 22.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Vedic Index*, ii, p. 216.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Tacitus, *Annals*, ii, 88.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Kṛṣṇa YV*, i, 3, 6; *Tait. Sam.*, i, 3, 5; v, 7, 6, 4; *Vāj. Sam.*, 18, 48, 26, 2, etc.

<sup>6</sup> *RV*, ix, 92, 6; x, 97, 6; Yāska, *Nighantū*, ii, 17; cf. Ghoshal, *History of Hindu Public Life*, pt. 1, pp. 17ff.

<sup>7</sup> *AV*, v, 19, 15; vi, 88, 3; cf. *RV*, x, 173.

<sup>8</sup> *RV*, x, 166, 4-5; *AV*, vi, 88, 3; xviii, 2, 56, etc.



to achieve the supreme power and that there was a chief of the nobles who was merely a *primus inter pares*.<sup>1</sup> Our sources further allude to what appears to be the royal insignia or symbol of political authority—the *danda*, rod, and the *dhanus*, bow—and to the *kṣatra*, or ruling authority passing from one head of the government to another, after the former's death.<sup>2</sup>

One R̥g Vedic hymn compares the nobles meeting in the assembly to fiend-slaying, disease-chasing herbs.<sup>3</sup> The implication seems to be that the ruling college was supposed to suppress social evils, such as theft and murder, and to maintain law and order to ensure the health of the political community. Moreover, there is constant mention of people trying to win the favour of the nobles who were expected to "subdue fell famine and evil want with store of grain and cattle." At the same time we find that all the members of the assembly proclaim their endeavour "to obtain possession by their own exertion," which seems to imply that all the heads of families were concerned with, and felt responsibility for, the progress and prosperity of the community.<sup>4</sup> There is a slight mention of the spoils being distributed among the nobles after they have offered a sixteenth part of them as an ancestral offering,<sup>5</sup> or have worshipped the fire.<sup>6</sup>

The practice of all the ruling nobles being called *rājās* appears to have left its trace in the tradition preserved in the preambles of some *Jātakas* that all the 7, 707 members of the Licchavian Assembly were called *rājās*.<sup>7</sup> Yet later evidence shows that in the Kingdom of Tong-Li (to be placed in southeast Rājasthān) "the chiefs gave themselves the title of *rājā*."<sup>8</sup>

Such, in short, is the picture of the nobles-*samiti* government arrived at from the study of the Vedic literature. The picture is lamentably vague and the study of some parallel institutions in other parts of the ancient world might assist in clarifying our

<sup>1</sup> R̥V, i, 40, 8; x, 166, 4-5; A V, vi, 88, 1-3; xviii, 2, 56.

<sup>2</sup> A V, ii, 6, 4; xviii, 2, 59-60.

<sup>3</sup> R̥V, x, 97, 6.

<sup>4</sup> R̥V, x, 42, 10; 43, 10; 40, 10; A V, xix, 62, 1, etc.

<sup>5</sup> A V, iii, 29, 1.

<sup>6</sup> R̥V, x, 191, 1.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. below, pp. 98ff.

<sup>8</sup> *Hou-Han Shu*, (Ssu-P Pei-Yao edn.), chap. 118, p. 98; cf., *Toung-Pao*, série ii, 8, 1907, chap. 118, of the French trans., pp. 194-5; an Oxyrhynchus papyrus also refers to the "chiefs of the Indians," E. Hultzsch, *JRAS*, 1904, p. 399.



understanding of institutions of the college of nobles and the *samiti*.

In spirit and character this form of Vedic aristocratic constitution is similar to those of some Greek oligarchies, though somewhat different in form. We have also noticed above the government of the Icelandic republic where a council of 39 representative chiefs ruled the state. Our college of rulers appears to have been a similar body, though we are not able to determine its exact number, and the *samiti* voiced the will of the people through the heads of families. The state of affairs found in early Germany and described by Tacitus provides an even closer parallel. "On small matters the chiefs consult; on larger questions the community; but with this limitation, that even the subjects, the decision of which rests with the people, are first handled by the chiefs."<sup>1</sup> These parallels give us certain details and add to our vague picture of this form of Vedic aristocratic government.

On the meagre evidence of the Vedic religious texts it is impossible to give more details of the procedure of administration and dispensation of justice. Early tribal governments did not generally frame new laws, so it is probable that these communities only maintained the customary law. Their tribal basis cannot be denied; in fact tribal membership appears to have been the main criterion of citizenship, even in the republics that flourished at the time of the Buddha and Mahāvira. Since all tribal societies have a certain method of meting out justice, this form of Vedic aristocracy, like the other three varieties, must have performed judicial functions and inflicted punishment on wrongdoers.

However, its prime duty was to provide protection for the people from external attacks and to encourage the prosperity of the political community. It was responsible for the internal administration and maintenance of law and order within its territory. It is probable that this form of government marked a development in the political institutions of Vedic India and was a transitional stage between the *sabhā-samiti* republic of the Atharvan period and the hereditary monarchy of the later Vedic period. The "chief noble" in due course acquired too much power, rising far above his equals, and the *samiti* shrank to a smaller size and began to be called a *pariṣad*. The noble's son, once appointed by his father, became the hereditary king and the *samiti* became the king's council.

<sup>1</sup> *Germania*, chap. II, p. 279.



Most of our material has already been used by previous historians in the study of the Vedic institutions such as the *sabhā*, the *samiti* and "popular" monarchy. In the preceding pages we have attempted to analyze the data from a new angle and the results arrived at are very different from those expressed by earlier scholars. These passages individually and collectively indicate distinct forms of aristocratic government which flourished during the Vedic period. However, there are many lacunae in the account which no historian at the present stage of knowledge can claim to fill. Thus, we are unable to locate these various governmental forms in exact geographical boundaries. The only thing we can say with certainty is that these four forms of aristocratic government were practised by the Vedic people in the northwestern region of India, stretching to the river Yamunā in the east and the Himālayas in the north, and centring on the land of the five rivers. We have attempted to explain the origin, development and interrelations of these forms on the scale of time, but can do little more than make suggestions which, in the present state of our knowledge of Vedic India and in the light of constitutional development in other parts of the ancient world, appear to be the most probable and convincing ones. The republics of a later period can be more or less accurately located and attributed to different ethnic groups, but they flourished about 300 years after the four special types of Vedic aristocracies and oligarchies had vanished.

#### *Vedic Aristocracies and the Northeastern Republics*

The preceding pages show that there was a more or less gradual development in the non-monarchical types of government in Vedic India, and that during the fourth stage a situation seems to have arisen which provided an opportune moment for the chief noble, the *rājā*, to become the virtual ruler and to exercise supreme authority over the political community to the extent that he could appoint his son to succeed him. This situation appears to have been reached at the time of the composition of the later *mandalas* of the *R̥k-Samhitā* and the *Atharva Veda*, and before the appearance of the sacrificial and philosophical literature.

In the later Vedic period, the *Brāhmaṇa* texts not only describe the rules and procedure of the sacrifice in minute detail, but also prescribe certain sacrifices like the *rājasūya*, *vājapeya*, *aśvamedha*, etc., by the performance of which a king was supposed to have



attained the higher kingly position of an *ekarāṭ* or a *samrāṭ*, a *sār-vabhauma* and even a *cakravartin*. Moreover, the Brāhmaṇical literature clearly reveals the fact that monarchy was virtually the universal form of government during that period.<sup>1</sup> That some Aryan peoples were moving eastwards is evident from the story of Videgha Māthava, recorded in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*.<sup>2</sup>

Significantly, however, hardly any reference is made in the voluminous *Brāhmaṇa* texts<sup>3</sup> to the republican or quasi-republican institutions of the early Vedic period, and whenever the *sabhā* or *samiti* are found, their connotation has changed entirely from that of the earlier popular institutions. During the 6th century B.C. a number of republican states certainly existed in northeastern India, as is attested by the sacred literature of the Buddhists and Jainas.<sup>4</sup> Now the question arises, was there some relationship between the early Vedic aristocracies and the northeastern republics of the time when the Buddha and the Kevalin preached their respective doctrines of the Middle Path and rigorous asceticism?

We have referred to the eastward migration of some Vedic peoples during the Brāhmaṇa period, and they settled and established kingdoms in the eastern region of the Bhāratavarṣa. On the other hand, the Pāli and Prākṛit literature brings to light the names of some republican peoples, most of whom are not found in the Vedic literature. Despite Smith's attempts to attribute a Tibetan home to the Licchavis,<sup>5</sup> it is noteworthy that all these names appear to be Indo-European. In fact, it seems that all these republican peoples were Aryans or at least highly Aryanized.

We have seen that during the period of the *Samhitās* there were, apart from the generally acknowledged monarchies, some special forms of aristocratic government, and that during the Brāhmaṇa period they had ceased to exist, some of them probably becoming

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Basham, *Wonder that was India*, pp. 42ff; cf. Landtman, *op. cit.* pp. 308-10: "Among the most primitive races tribal authority is exercised almost universally in the democratic form of a general council, while governments representing the monarchic principles are almost entirely absent among peoples usually relegated to the lowest." Cf. pp. 310-16.

<sup>2</sup> *Sat. Br.*, i, 4, 1, 10ff; cf. below, pp. 136ff.

<sup>3</sup> The only reference known to us is that to the *svarājya* and *vairājya* types of constitution of the Uttara Kurus and Uttara Madras in the *Ait. Br.*, viii, 14, which may have a different meaning.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Rhys Davids, *Buddhist India*, pp. 17ff; Basham, *Wonder that was India*, pp. 46ff.

<sup>5</sup> V. A. Smith, *Indian Antiquary*, xxxii, 1903, pp. 233-36.



hereditary monarchies.<sup>1</sup> During this period, the monarchy of the Vedic times appears to have undergone a change, in the sense that whereas the Vedic monarchies were limited to the extent that the king was only the *primus inter pares*, the monarchies of the Brāhmaṇa period had become more totally autocratic. The power and prestige of the king grew to the extent that he began to be regarded as divine.<sup>2</sup> His power and authority reigned supreme in his domain and he held the power either to condemn a subject to death or to appoint him to the highest office. With such great power the king ~~might~~ might become oppressive and thus encourage some people to migrate eastwards. It might be expected that the migrants consisted chiefly of the republican tribes who resented such oppression. In order to preserve their identity, therefore, they also might have joined in or followed in the train of other marchers to the east led by Videgha.

✓ In other words, it is most likely that the republican peoples of the Buddhist period had their origin in the Vedic aristocracies of the northwest and that their republican constitutions were adaptations or developments of the non-monarchical Vedic political communities. The existence of these republican states in the 6th century B.C. in northeastern India was thus by no means a bolt from the blue, but rather was the result of a gradual progress with a long history behind it, going back at least to the days when the earliest hymns of the *Rg Veda* were chanted.

The study of the proceeding chapters will show how the republics of the Buddhist period were a development from the Vedic aristocracies. In this research we have been greatly aided by the fact that there are more details about the geographical location of the former, their administration and judicial procedure and their relations with neighbouring states than have come down to us regarding the earlier Vedic aristocracies.

### *The Question of the Vidatha*

There are more views and opinions about the nature and character of the *vidatha* than the number of scholars who have worked on the subject; many scholars have maintained more than one hypothesis. That the sources are open to different interpretations is obvious

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Greenidge, *op. cit.*, p. 154; Whibley, *op. cit.*, pp. 62ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Ait. Br.*, viii, 2; *Tait. Br.*, xviii, 10, 10; *Sat. Br.*, v, i, 5, 14; xii, 4, 4, 3, etc; cf. Altekar, *State and Government*, pp. 89ff.



from the divergent views held about the origin, development and functions of the *sabhā* (council) and *samiti* (assembly). The Vedic literature provides numerous vague references to the *vidatha*. In the *R̥g Veda* alone at least 97 verses refer to it, while the *Atharva Veda* mentions it in about 20 hymns. The *Vājasaneyī Samhitā*, the *Brāhmaṇas* and the *Taittirīya Āraṇyaka* also contain references to the *vidatha*. Most of the evidence, however, is provided by the *R̥g Vedic* hymns, and references to this institution are fewer in the later compositions of Vedic literature.

To substantiate our interpretation we quote below some of the most important verses from the *R̥g* and *Atharva Vedas* which refer explicitly to the *vidatha* and reveal its character and composition, and the role it played in the Vedic period.<sup>1</sup>

1. To him who worships, Soma gives the milch-cow, a fleet steed,  
and a man of active knowledge;  
Skilled in home duties, meet for the *vidatha*, for council meet  
[*sabheyam*], a glory to his father.<sup>2</sup>
2. May the most sapient Maruts, with protection, with best  
boons brought from lofty heaven, approach us;  
Now when their team of the most noble horses speeds even  
on the sea's extremest limit.<sup>3</sup>  
Well grasped, bright, decked with gold, like a spear carried  
rearward;  
Like a young woman (or bride) of a man going out secretly  
(with another man);  
Like refined speech in the *vidatha*.<sup>4</sup>
3. Upon their car the young men set the Maiden (Rodasi-  
Lightning) wedded to glory, mighty in the *vidatha*;  
When your song, Maruts, arose, and with oblation the Soma-  
pourer sang his hymn in worship.<sup>5</sup>
4. O Brahmanaspati, be thou controller of this our hymn,  
and prosper thou our children;  
All that the gods regard with love is blessed. Lord may we  
speak, with heroes, in the *vidatha*.<sup>6</sup>
5. Yea (Dawn), even this blessed Morning, rich in store of food,  
splendid with heavenly lustre, hath shone out for man;

<sup>1</sup> The versions are those of Griffith with occasional amendment.

<sup>2</sup> *RV*, i, 91, 20.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 167, 2.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 167, 3; *guhā carantī manuṣo na yoṣā sabhāvatī vidathyeva sam vāk*.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 167, 6.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, ii, 24, 16; *brhad vadema vidathe suvirāḥ*. The *sabhā* occurs in verse 13; *AV*, xviii, 3, 24.

Since they, as was the wish of yearning gods, brought forth that yearning Agni for the *vidatha* as priest.<sup>1</sup>

6. Let Pūṣan take thy (Sūryā's) hand and hence conduct thee; may the two Aśvins on their car transport thee.

Go to the house to be the householder's mistress, and speak as lady to thy *vidatha*.<sup>2</sup>

Happy be thou and prosper with thy children here: be vigilant to manage thy household in this home.

Closely unite thy body with this man, thy lord;

So shall ye, full of years, speak to the *vidatha*.<sup>3</sup>

7. We, band on band and troop following troop (*gaṇam-gaṇam*), entreat with fair lands Agni's splendour and the Maruts' might.

With spotted deer for steeds, with wealth that never fails, they, the wise ones (gods), come to the sacrifice (*yajñām*) at our *vidatha*.<sup>4</sup>

8. The pleasant priest (Agni) has come into the *vidatha*, true, skilled in sacrifice, the most wise, Ordainer.

Agni, the son of strength, whose car is lightning, whose hair is flame, has shown his lustre on earth.<sup>5</sup>

9. Agni, thou art king Varuṇa whose laws stand fast; as Mitra wonder-worker, thou must be implored.

Aryaman, heroes' Lord, art thou, enriching all, and liberal Amśa in the *vidatha*, O thou god.<sup>6</sup>

10. At Jātavedas' *vidatha* I will speak aloud the conquering might of the swift red-hued steer.

A pure and fresher hymn flows to Vaiśvānara, even so for Agni lovely Soma is made pure.<sup>7</sup>

11. The princely worshippers who send to those who sing thy praise, O Agni, reward graced with kine and steeds—

Lead thou both these and us forward to higher bliss, with brave men in the *vidatha*, may we speak aloud.<sup>8</sup>

12. May Indra come to us for our protection; here be the hero praised, our feast's companion;

May he whose powers are many, waxen mighty, cherish, like Dyaus (the Asura) his own supreme dominion.

<sup>1</sup> *RV*, x, 11, 3; *agnim hotāraṁ vidathāya jījanan*. The *samiti* occurs in verse 8, *yad agna eṣā samitir bhavāti*; cf. *AV*, xviii, 1, 20.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 85, 26; *grhān gaccha grhapatnī yathāso vaśinī tvam vidatham ā vadāsi*. Cf. *AV*, xiv, 1, 20.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 85, 27; cf. *AV*, xiv, 1, 21.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, iii, 26, 6.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 14, 1.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, ii, 1, 4.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, vi, 8, 1.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, ii, 1, 16; *brhad vadema vidathe suvirāḥ*; 23 hymns in this *maṇḍala* conclude with this *pāda*.



- Here magnify his (Indra's) great heroic exploits, most glorious one, enriching men with bounties;  
Whose will is like a sovereign (*samrāt*) in the *vidatha*, invocation to the triumphant, all surpassing.<sup>1</sup>
13. Agni, the Hotar-priest, the accomplisher of the *vidatha*, waker of knowledge, chief controller of thought—  
Him, yea, none other than thyself, does man elect at sacrificial offerings, great and small alike.<sup>2</sup>  
Here Agni, the arrangers, those attached to thee, elect thee as their priest in the *vidatha*.  
When men with strewn clipped grass and sacrificial gifts offer thee entertainment, piously inclined.<sup>3</sup>
14. The glorious Agni, have I praised with the sacred food. May Agni deck the gods for us.  
Between both *vidathas* he goes on his embassy, the wise; May all the others die away.<sup>4</sup>
15. The Maruts watch the man who sings their praises, promoters of the thought of him who worships.  
Sit down on sacred grass in our *vidathas*, this day, with friendly minds, to share the bouquet.<sup>5</sup>
16. This Soma here, the wise, the all-obtainer, flows on his way as king of all existence.  
Driving the drops at our *vidathas*, Indu completely traverses the fleecy filter.<sup>6</sup>
17. How shall I serve thee, Maghavan, though knowing fully well what heroic deeds thou hast accomplished?  
And the fresh deeds which thou wilt do, most mighty! these too, will we declare in the *vidathas*.<sup>7</sup>
18. As it were some goodly treasure Mātariśvan brought, as a gift the glorious priest to Bhṛgu;  
Banner of the *vidatha*, the good protector, child of two births, the swiftly moving envoy (Agni).<sup>8</sup>
19. Slight us not Varuṇa, Aryaman, or Mitra, Ṛbhukṣan, Indra, Āyu or the Maruts,  
When we declare amid the *vidatha* the virtues of the strong-steed, god-descended.<sup>9</sup>
20. I, in remembrance of thine ancient favour, have sung my hymns in this our third *vidatha* (of the day).

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, iv, 21, 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, x, 91, 8.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 91, 9.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, vii, 39, 1.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, vii, 57, 2.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, ix, 97, 56.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, v, 29, 13.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, i, 60, 1; *cp.* *RV*, iii, 3, 3.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 162, 1.

- O Agni, give us wealth with store of heroes and mighty strength in food and noble offspring.<sup>1</sup>
21. The fair-tongued Savitar, the golden-handed, comes thrice (for daily sacrifices) from heaven in our *vidatha*.  
Bear to the gods this song of praise, and send us then, Savitar, complete and perfect safety.<sup>2</sup>
22. Streams! The wise gods (Viśvedevas) have thrice three habitations. Child of three mothers (? three seasons), he is Lord in the *vidathas*.  
Three are the holy ladies of the waters (Ilā, Sarasvatī, Bhārati), thrice (at three daily sacrifices) here from heaven supreme in our *vidatha*.<sup>3</sup>
23. The *vidatha*, in which the gods rejoice, seated in Vivasvat's (the Sun's) dwelling (*sadane*)  
Has given the Moon his beams, the sun his splendour; the two unweariedly maintain their brightness.<sup>4</sup>
24. At the great *vidatha* will I laud thy (Indra's) two bay steeds; I prize the sweet strong drink of thee, the warrior god. His who pours lovely oil as it were with yellow drops. Let my songs enter thee whose form hath golden tints.<sup>5</sup>
25. Of Indra is the might celestial nobly formed; the singer in the house (*grhe kavīḥ*) is Agni, the prudent sage; And he is the sacrifice (*yajñah*) in the *vidatha*, fair, most near. We ask for freedom and complete felicity.<sup>6</sup>
26. This world's imperial kings, O Mitra-Varuṇa, ye rule in the *vidatha*, looking on the light.  
We pray for rain, your boon, and immortality; through heaven and over earth the thunderers (roaring winds) take their way.<sup>7</sup>
27. To the eastern sacrifice (*prāñcam yajñam*) have we turned; may the hymn aid it; with wood and worship shall they (the priests) honour Agni.  
From heaven the *vidatha* of the wise has learned it: even for the quick and strong they seek advancement.<sup>8</sup>
28. Within the house (*durone*) sat the king immortal of mortals (Agni), the accomplisher of the *vidatha*.  
Bedewed with holy oil he shines widely, Agni, the knower of all secret wisdom.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, ii, 4, 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, iii, 54, 11.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 56, 5; also see verse 8.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, x, 12, 7; *AV*, xviii, 1, 35.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 96, 1; *AV*, xx, 30, 1.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 100, 6.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, v, 63, 2.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, iii, 1, 2; *cp.* Sāyaṇa & Ludwig's Comments.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, iii 1, 18.



29. Immortal sacrificer, god with wondrous power (Agni), he leads the way—urging the great *vidathas* on.<sup>1</sup>
30. We have beheld the brightness of her (Dawn's) shining; it spreads and drives away the darksome monster.  
Like tints that deck the post at the *vidathas*, heaven's daughter has attained her wondrous splendour.<sup>2</sup>
31. Bring ye (Viśvedevas) the great Aramati (? personification of religious worship) before you, and Pūṣan as the hero of the *vidatha*.  
Bhaga who looks upon this hymn with favour, and, as our strength, the bountiful Purandhi.<sup>3</sup>
32. In every age bestow upon the singers wealth, worthy of the *vidatha*, glorious, ever new.  
King (Agni) undecaying, as it were with sharpened bolt, smite down the sinner like a tree with lightning-flash.<sup>4</sup>
33. Like babes in arms reposing on their mothers, let the gods (Viśvedevas) sit upon the grass's summit.  
Let general fire make bright the flame of worship: scorn us not Agni, in the gods' *vidatha*.<sup>5</sup>
34. Thou (Lightning) whom all the gods created, the bold one (the gods) making all anew for hurling—do thou be sung in the *vidatha*, be merciful to us;  
To thee as such be homage, O Goddess.<sup>6</sup>
35. What of you is joyous, O Fathers, and delectable (*somya*), there will be at hand, for you are of (your) own splendour, Do you, rapid poets, listen, invoked at the *vidatha*.<sup>7</sup>
36. Come you (Agni) obstructing the track of death, assuming furthermore a longer lifetime;  
Sitting in your station (*sadhasthe*), thrust away death;  
Then may we, living, speak to the *vidatha*.<sup>8</sup>
37. Thou (sun) goest about Tṛta (?), thou goest about the fountain of a thousand streams, the heaven-gaining *vidatha*.  
Thine O Indra, are heroisms manifold; do thou fill us with cattle of all forms, set me in comfort in the highest firmament.<sup>9</sup>
38. The offered *ghee*, the milk, which is in the ruddy (kine), that is your portion here, ye Ásvins; come,

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, 27, 7.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, i, 92, 5.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, vii, 36, 8; Sāyaṇa takes *mahim aramatim* as "the never-resting Earth; cf. Muir, *O.S. Texts*, iv, p. 317; Griffith, ii, p. 21 fn. 8.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, vi, 8, 5.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, vii, 43, 3.

<sup>6</sup> *AV*, i, 13, 4. The versions are those of Bloomfield with occasional alterations. The text is from S. D. Satavalekar's edition.

<sup>7</sup> *AV*, xviii, 3, 19.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, xii, 2, 30.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, xvii, 1, 15.

Ye sweet ones, maintainers of the *vidatha*,  
 Lords of the good, drink ye the heated *ghee* or oblation  
 (*gharma*)<sup>1</sup> in the shining space of the sky.<sup>2</sup>

39. Where the eagles in *vidatha* sound incessantly (*animesam*)  
 unto the drought of *amṛta*—thus the shepherd of all  
 existence (*viśvasya bhuvanasya gopāḥ*) he (*ātmā*) the  
 wise one entered there into me that am simple.<sup>3</sup>
40. The (two) invokers of the gods, first, well-voiced, shaping  
 the sacrifice (*yajñam*) for man (*manuṣo*) to sacrifice  
 (*yajadhyai*); urging forward at the *vidathas*, the (two)  
 singers (*kārū*) pointing out the ancient light through  
 the the fore-regions.<sup>4</sup>

According to Roth, the sense of *vidatha* is primarily “order”,  
 then “the concrete body which gives the orders”, then the “assem-  
 bly” for secular or religious ends or for war.<sup>5</sup> This interpretation is  
 vague and so far as we know *vidatha* is never used in the sense of  
 “order” or giver of orders.<sup>6</sup> Oldenberg once thought that the main  
 idea of the *vidatha* was “ordinance” (from *vi-dhā*, dispose, ordain)  
 and thence “sacrifice”.<sup>7</sup> There are various views about the deri-  
 vation of the word, and its origin from *vid*, “to know”, is most  
 probable, but it has been taken to stand for “sacrifice” in some  
 passages of the *Rg Veda*<sup>8</sup> and the *Atharva Veda*.<sup>9</sup> Ludwig thought  
 that the root idea of the *vidatha* was an “assembly”, especially of  
 the Maghavans and the Brāhmaṇas.<sup>10</sup> In some of the verses the  
 word occurs in the sense of a mere gathering or assemblage of  
 people, and has no political connotation.<sup>11</sup> Geldner held that the  
 word primarily meant “knowledge”, “wisdom”, “priestly-lore”,  
 then “sacrifice”, and “spiritual authority”.<sup>12</sup> This view also appears  
 to be only partially right, though more convincing than the others.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Monier Williams, *op. cit.*, s.v. *gharma*.

<sup>2</sup> *AV*, vii, 77, 4.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, ix, 9, 22.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, v, 12, 7.

<sup>5</sup> Böhtlinck and Roth, *Skt. Wörterb.*, s.v. *Vidatha*, based on *RV*, i, 31, 6; 117, 25; iii, 1, 18; *AV*, iv, 25, 1; v, 20, 12; *RV*, ii, 1, 4; iii, 38, 5-6; i, 166, 2; v, 59, 2, etc.

<sup>6</sup> For further details see below, pp. 70ff.

<sup>7</sup> *SBE*, v. 46, p. 26ff; cf. Macdonell, *Vedic Grammar*, p. 23, fn. 10.

<sup>8</sup> *RV*, x, 11, 3; i, 60, 1; x, 92, 2; 91, 8; v, 33, 9; iii, 38, 5, etc.; cf. below, pp. 75ff.

<sup>9</sup> *AV*, vii, 77, 4; xviii, 1, 20; xx, 30, 1, etc.; cf. below, pp. 75ff.

<sup>10</sup> Tr. of the *RV*, iii, pp. 259ff.

<sup>11</sup> *AV*, ix, 14, 22.

<sup>12</sup> *Vedische Studien*, i, p. 147; *RV Glossen*, p. 161.



However, there is not much evidence to show that only the learned and the wise were concerned with the *vidatha*, and that it meant spiritual authority. Bloomfield, on the other hand, insisted that the *vidatha* referred to a "house" in the first place (from *vid*, acquire) and then to the "sacrifice" as connected with the house.<sup>1</sup> In the opinion of Keith and Macdonell "this . . . appears to suit all the passages."<sup>2</sup> We do not agree with this interpretation entirely, although in some cases the *vidatha* stands for sacrifice. Its connection with house is misleading. Bloomfield's derivation of the word from *vid*, to acquire, is doubtful. This connotation may have been given to the word at a later period. In Vedic literature the root *vid* has primarily the connotation of knowledge, and not of acquisition.<sup>3</sup> ✓

Zimmer held the view that the *vidatha* sometimes meant a "smaller assembly" than the *samiti*.<sup>4</sup> This view has been rightly criticized by the writers of the *Vedic Index* who say that "we have no ground to be certain that such smaller assemblies ever existed at an early date in India or elsewhere among the Aryan peoples."<sup>5</sup> In Jayaswal's opinion religious life was organized through the "*vidatha* assembly, which had existed even earlier than the *samiti*". "It seems", he writes, "to have been the parent folk-assembly from which the *sabhā*, *samiti* and *senā* differentiated, for we find the *vidatha* associated with civil, military and religious functions."<sup>6</sup> This, however, is too adventurous a view and cannot be substantiated by our sources.<sup>7</sup> Professor Thieme, somewhat following Oldenberg, attempted yet another etymology and derived it from *vi-dhā*, primarily meaning "verteilen, zuteilen", and also "order" in the secondary sense.<sup>8</sup> In Thieme's view these meanings can fit almost all the contexts.<sup>9</sup> We do not support his hypothesis because in our opinion this interpretation of *vidatha* seems to be valid only for a few occurrences of the word.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *JAOS*, xix, 25, pp. 12ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Vedic Index*, ii, pp. 296-7.

<sup>3</sup> Monier Williams, *op. cit.*, s.v. *vid* and *vidatha*.

<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 177.

<sup>5</sup> *Vedic Index*, ii, p. 297.

<sup>6</sup> *Hindu Polity*, p. 20. Based on Roth and *RV*, iii, 38, 5; ii, 1, 4; iii, 1, 4.

<sup>7</sup> For further discussion see below, pp. 70ff.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. P. Thieme, *Untersuchungen zur Wortkunde und Auslegung des Rig Veda, Vidatha*, pp. 35-7.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 37-49.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. below, pp. 75ff.



Altekar derived the word from the root *vid*, to know, and suggested that it indicated a religious or sacrificial gathering, the rituals which required the highest knowledge. In his opinion, "it was a big assembly, probably representing the entire tribe, because there are references to people being arranged there by groups, and singing and dancing."<sup>1</sup> His view, like that of Jayaswal's and others, that it was a big assembly of the entire tribe is unwarranted by the sources. A local settlement can well provide enough people to be arranged in groups of singers and dancers.

In recent years Professor R. S. Sharma has strongly pleaded the case for the *vidatha*, following the pattern of Jayaswal.<sup>2</sup> In his opinion also, "the *vidatha* was the earliest folk-assembly of the Indo-Āryans attended both by men and women, performing all kinds of functions, economic, military, religious and social."<sup>3</sup> This view, like the earlier ones, needs careful scrutiny, and we shall first examine his arguments one by one.

Following Roth, Jayaswal had suggested that the *vidatha* seemed to have been "the parent folk-assembly from which the *sabhā*, *samiti* and *senā* differentiated." Professor Sharma does not support this view outright, but implies more or less the same thing when he states that "although there is no direct evidence to establish the institutional connection between the *vidatha* on the one hand, and the *sabhā* and *samiti* on the other, an examination of the mass of the occurrences of the word in different contexts would show prominent traces of the earliest folk-assembly in the *vidatha*."<sup>4</sup> In order to strengthen his case, Sharma seeks parallels from some anthropological studies of later tribal peoples, and further compares the *vidatha*, "in particular, to the religious functions of the early assemblies of the Indo-European peoples." Then he appears to compare the *vidatha* not with the Roman *comitia*, but with "each of the thirty curies, which . . . had its peculiar worship and chapel."<sup>5</sup>

The *vidatha* cannot be compared with the Roman *comitia* because the latter was a political institution like the *samiti* of the Vedic

<sup>1</sup> *State and Government*, p. 141; see also J. P. Sharma, *op. cit.*, p. 56, for Professor H. W. Bailey's remark and Renou's interpretation of the *vidatha*.

<sup>2</sup> *Pol. Ideas and Inst.*, pp. 63-80. It first appeared as an article in *JBRS*, 1952, pp. 429-448.

<sup>3</sup> *Pol. Ideas and Inst.*, p. 79; *cp.* Mukerji, *op. cit.*, pp. 85-6.

<sup>4</sup> *Pol. Ideas and Inst.*, p. 64.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73; based on Wm. Smith, *A Small History of Rome*, p. 18.



aristocracies. The *comitia centuriata* was the assembly of the *curiae* or wards at Rome.<sup>1</sup> Such wards were not only unknown to Vedic Indians, but also even to the later republics of the Buddhist period. The *comitia* also dealt with "election to certain priesthoods, and other religious matters",<sup>2</sup> whereas there is no evidence to show that the *vidatha* did so on the tribal level. In fact, the latter cannot be compared with the former in any respect. Moreover, Sharma seems to be contradicting himself in comparing the *vidatha* with each of the thirty Roman *curiae*. In that case he admits that the *vidatha* was a local body and even then the analogy cannot go further because the *curia* was a political constituency, which the *vidatha* was not. Hence the comparison is unsuitable.

Another significant claim of Professor Sharma is that "women attended the meetings of the *vidatha* and took part in its deliberations", and that it was "a sort of assembly." He further says that in some cases "the *Vidatha* means a family council", which he compares to the council of the Iroquois, which generally served as the "democratic assembly of all adult male and female members of the gens, all with equal voice".<sup>3</sup> "In this respect," Sharma continues "the *Vidatha* was completely different from the earliest known Greek Roman and German popular assemblies, in which woman did not find any place."<sup>4</sup> He infers the antiquity of the *vidatha* by noticing the right of women to take part in popular assemblies according to the old Welsh laws of "not later than the eleventh century A.D."<sup>5</sup> These institutions of a civilised mediaeval people can hardly be accepted as evidence of women's rights among the earliest Indo-European peoples, except by one who is fully convinced of the absolute accuracy of the Marxist hypothesis that matriarchy invariably preceded patriarchy.<sup>6</sup>

There are a number of weaknesses in the line of argument which Professor Sharma has followed. We think that the mere association

<sup>1</sup> Harvey, *op. cit.*, pp. 117ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>3</sup> *Pol. Ideas and Inst.*, p. 65; cites F. Engels, *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, p. 126; Radcliffe-Brown, *Andaman Islanders*, p. 44, and Landtman, *op. cit.*, p. 312 as his evidence.

<sup>4</sup> *Pol. Ideas and Inst.*, p. 65-6.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66; based on Engels, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

<sup>6</sup> For he states that "if we assume that matriarchy preceded patriarchy, it will have to be admitted that the *vidatha* is an institution of the highest antiquity." *Ibid.* p. 65.



of women with the *vidatha* does not necessarily make it “a sort of assembly”. We do not deny that the women took part in the *vidatha* and its ceremonies, but this only shows that in this respect it was unlike the political institutions of the *sabhā* and the *samiti*. In no early assemblies of the ancient Indo-European republican peoples, except the Germans,<sup>1</sup> do we find the association of women, and the fact that they participated in the *vidatha* is a strong argument in favour of the conclusion that it was *not* a political assembly at all, but a mere gathering of a settlement for the performance of religious ceremonies. In all Hindu sacrifices and religious ceremonies women participate with men. Hence, their association with the *vidatha* points to its non-political nature, and its local as opposed to tribal character.

Sharma's acceptance of the *vidatha* as a “family council” in certain contexts, and his comparison of it with the “democratic assembly” of the Iroquois gens show that the analogy is not accurate. The family council consists of the members, male and female, of one family—grandparents, their sons and daughters-in-law and their grandsons and grand-daughters-in-law—, whereas gens are formed of a number of such families. Therefore, Sharma's comparison of the *vidatha* “family council” with the “democratic assembly” of the Iroquois gens is also erroneous. Moreover, even if he means a gens-council by the term “family council”, we have no evidence to show that the women attended such councils in Vedic times. In both cases the analogy is false.

Moreover, the comparison of the “earliest known Greek, Roman and German popular assemblies” is not suitable because they were political institutions. A more approximate comparison of these popular assemblies would be with the Vedic *samiti*. Sharma admits that, unlike the *sabhā* and the *samiti*, there is “no direct evidence of its (the *vidatha*'s) tribal character”,<sup>2</sup> but he tries to show that “the association of the *gaṇa* with the *vidatha* may be taken as indirect evidence” of this.<sup>3</sup> The term *gaṇa* here<sup>4</sup> simply means a group of people, and not “tribal groups”, as Sharma interprets it.

<sup>1</sup> We believe that Sharma is wrong, at least in the case of the early Germans who “conceived that in woman was a certain uncanny and prophetic sense; they neither scorned to consult them nor slighted their answers”; cf. Tacitus, *Germania*, chap. 8, p. 277.

<sup>2</sup> *Pol. Ideas and Inst.*, p. 66.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66, *RV*, iii, 26, 6; see our discussion of the *gaṇa* above, pp. 8-14.



Other references to the *gaṇa* in the passages he uses are in connection with the Maruts. Thus, the arguments for the *vidatha*'s tribal character produced by Professor Sharma are indeed very weak and inconclusive.

Then, Professor Sharma talks of the "function of debate" being exercised by the "Vedic assemblies, e.g., the *vidatha*, the *sabhā* and *samiti*" which, in his opinion, "is not to be found in the early popular assemblies of the other Indo-European peoples".<sup>1</sup> He forgets that the Roman *patres-familias* elected the *rex* before the foundation of the republic, and that later the *comitia centuriata*, the assembly of the Roman Republic, elected the chief magistrates and heard appeals in capital cases.<sup>2</sup> The Athenian *ecclesia* had the absolute power of the republic; it debated on the questions of war and peace, and it was the members of the *ecclesia* who tried Socrates.<sup>3</sup> It was the community of the early Germans which chose chiefs, conducted trials and decided larger questions.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, we have also noticed the role that the Vikings played in the election of their chiefs. Hence, it is a wrong assertion that "the early popular assemblies of the other Indo-European peoples" had no debating function.

Dr. Sharma further ingeniously suggests, on very meagre grounds, that the *vidatha* as an assembly "made laws and ordinances for the regulation of the affairs of the tribe".<sup>5</sup> We have no evidence even of the *sabhā* and the *samiti* making laws and ordinances. In fact, there is no evidence to suggest that any early assemblies, such as those of the Greeks and the Romans or others, had legislative functions. This is a clear case of imposing later ideas on earlier institutions.

On the authority of Oldenberg,<sup>6</sup> Sharma says that the *vidatha* distributed amongst its members whatever they procured as food, because in one hymn members are summoned in the *vidatha* on the occasion of the distribution of whatever is produced daily by Savitar,<sup>7</sup> and because Agni is described as the liberal distributor of produce in the *vidatha*. He points out that in this respect the

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>2</sup> Harvey, *op. cit.*, p. 117; cf. Heitland, *op. cit.*, pp. 40ff.

<sup>3</sup> Greenidge, *op. cit.*, pp. 211ff; Whibley, *op. cit.*, pp. 165ff; Plato's *Dialogues*, pp. 423ff.

<sup>4</sup> Tacitus, *Germania*, chap. 11ff., pp. 277ff.

<sup>5</sup> *Pol. Ideas and Inst.*, p. 67.

<sup>6</sup> *SBE*, xlv, p. 26.

<sup>7</sup> *RV*, vii, 40, 1.



*vidatha* stood in sharp contrast to the *sabhā* and the *samiti*.<sup>1</sup> The distribution of produce by Savitar and Agni's being called a liberal distributor do not prove that the *vidatha* performed such a function. We have shown above that the *sabhā* and *samiti* are alluded to as distributing the spoils of war amongst their members.<sup>2</sup>

Sharma further says that the main military function of the *vidatha* may have been to "conduct the tribal war against hostile tribes."<sup>3</sup> Altekar rightly criticizes this view which, he says, "is untenable, nor did it (the *vidatha*) do every distributive work".<sup>4</sup> The passage that Sharma cites in support of the military function of the *vidatha* is not conclusive. The passage in question is *byhad vadema vidathe suvīrāḥ*,<sup>5</sup> which Sharma translates as "with brave sons (or heroes) in the assembly (*vidatha*) may we speak aloud"; closely following Griffith, who also takes *suvīrāḥ* to mean "brave men."<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, Geldner translates the *pāda* as "*wir möchten das grosse Wort führen als Meister in der weisen Rede.*"<sup>7</sup> Geldner emphasizes the point of wisdom in the word *suvīra*, and here apparently interprets *vidatha* as "wise counsel". However, *suvīra* has the definite connotation of "hero", and should be translated as "with good heroes may we speak high (or boast) in the congregation." It is a prayer to the gods and expresses the wish of the singers that they might have good heroes in their settlement.

We have examined the six central *maṇḍalas* (ii to vii) of the *R̥g Veda* in order to see how various hymns are concluded by the ṛṣi-poets who composed them. After an analysis of 620 hymns which comprise these six *maṇḍalas*, we come to the conclusion that the manner of ending the hymn is a matter of individual style and no implicit faith can be put in such repetitions. The second *maṇḍala* contains as many as 23 hymns which end with the *pāda* quoted above.<sup>8</sup> In the third *maṇḍala*, 12 out of 62 hymns end in "who

<sup>1</sup> *Pol. Ideas and Inst.*, pp. 67-68.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. above, p. 52.

<sup>3</sup> *Pol. Ideas and Inst.*, p. 69.

<sup>4</sup> *State and Government*, p. 141 fn. 1.

<sup>5</sup> *RV*, ii, 1, 16.

<sup>6</sup> Griffith translates it as "with brave men in the assembly may we speak aloud."

<sup>7</sup> His translation of *RV*, ii, 1, 16.

<sup>8</sup> *RV*, ii, 1, 16; 2, 13; 11, 21; 12, 15; 13, 13; 14, 12; 15, 10; 16, 9; 17, 9; 18, 9; 19, 9; 20, 9; 23, 19; 24, 16; 27, 17; 28, 11; 29, 7; 33, 15; 35, 15; 39, 8; also i, 117, 25. Sharma pointed out only 21 such verses.



slays the Vṛtras, wins and gathers riches,"<sup>1</sup> and seven end with yet another stock formula, while the remainder have individual final *pādas*. In the fourth at least 8 hymns end in a set style.<sup>2</sup> The fifth and sixth books also have hymns ending in the same words, and in the seventh *maṇḍala* we find as many as 65 hymns ending with the same *pāda*, "Ye gods, preserve us evermore with blessings".<sup>3</sup>

In the light of the above data it seems that all the endings of these hymns indicate is the individual style of the poet. The 23 hymns ending with the wish of the singers to be able to boast with heroes in the congregation indicate no more than the need for strong warriors in the settlement for whose members the hymns were composed. There is nothing here to show that the *vidatha* had any military function as such, but no doubt its members, like the mediaeval bards, prayed for the success of the tribal army (*senā*) which was distinct from the *vidatha*, and associated with the *sabhā* and *samiti*.

Professor Sharma continues, in presenting his argument, that the "people gathered in this assembly (*vidatha*), fought together, sang together, prayed together, played together and deliberated together without any discrimination of sex".<sup>4</sup> We have examined the evidence with regard to the *vidatha* and do not fully agree with this statement. At the village congregations people might have sung together without discrimination of sex, but there is no evidence to show that they fought together, deliberated together and played together in the *vidatha*. We have shown the evidence for the *sabhā* and the *samiti* doing all these things, but there is no ground to attribute all these activities to the *vidatha*.

We have quoted, at the beginning of this section, a representative sample, consisting of about one-third of the total of 117 passages, which refer to the institution of the *vidatha* in the two *Vedas*. They include most of the passages used by Professor Sharma in his argument. It is evident that the *vidatha* was a popular institution of the Vedic Indians, but its occurrences are independent of, and comparatively fewer than, those of *jana* and the *viś*, denoting tribe or

<sup>1</sup> *RV*, iii, 30-2, 34-6, 38, 39, 43, 48-50(hymn nos.).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, iv, hymns 16, 17, 19-24.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, vii, hymns 1, 3, 4, 7-9, 11-14, 19-30, 34-7, 39-43, 45-8, 51, 53-4, 56-8, 60-5, 67-73, 75-80, 84-8, 90-3, 95, 97-101.

<sup>4</sup> *Pol. Ideas and Inst.*, pp. 79-80.



people, which occur 275 and 271 times respectively.<sup>1</sup> If the *vidatha* were a tribal organization, as Professor Sharma gives us to understand, one would expect it to be associated either with the *jana* or *viś*. But in fact there is not a single hymn in the entire *Ṛg* collection which associates *vidatha* with these two words. Hence, it can be fairly concluded that the *vidatha*, unlike the *sabhā* and *samiti*, did not have a tribal connotation.

In order to show the *vidatha*'s tribal character, Sharma depends entirely on its association with *gaṇa*,<sup>2</sup> the term which he mistakenly interprets to be a "technical word for the republic" in the *Ṛg Veda*. His evidence of the tribal character of the *vidatha* and the *gaṇa* comes from a later source which gives 63 as the number of the *gaṇa* of Maruts.<sup>3</sup> This is the largest number of the Maruts' *gaṇa* we have from the Vedic sources. Thus, the dissociation of the *vidatha* from the most common terms for the tribe, i.e. *jana* and *viś*, and the largest number of members of a *gaṇa* being too small even to form a settlement, forbid all attempts at making the *vidatha* a tribal folk-assembly of the Vedic people.

According to our interpretation of the sources, the *samiti* alone was the popular institution of the Vedic period. What evidence there is for an earliest folk-assembly of the Vedic people is connected with the *samiti*, and according to our suggestion, it developed from the *viś*-body.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the *viś* would be the forerunner of the *samiti*. We have shown above that the *viś* heads of families elected the king, and that it represented the earliest stage of political development in the non-monarchical political communities.<sup>5</sup> If the *vidatha* were the earliest folk-assembly, it would be expected that it participated in some important tribal functions, such as the election of a king. We know of no verse in the *Ṛg* and *Atharva Vedas* which associates the *vidatha* with the establishment of a man to kingship.

Out of about 100 references to *vidatha* in the *Ṛg Veda* it occurs only twice in connection with the *sabhā*,<sup>6</sup> once in the same hymn as the *sabhā*<sup>7</sup> and only once does it appear in the same hymn as

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66; based on *RV*, iii, 26, 6.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82; *Śat. Br.*, ii, 5, 1, 12; *Taṇḍya Mahābrāhmaṇa*, xix, 14, 2.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. above, pp. 18ff.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. above, pp. 22ff.

<sup>6</sup> *RV*, i, 91, 20; 167, 3.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, ii, 24, 13 (*sabhā*), 16 (*vidathe*). The order of the words is also sig-



*samiti*,<sup>1</sup> where it stands for “one worthy of the Congregation” (*vidathyam*); “congregation” (*vidathyā*) and “sacrifice” (*vidatha*). These rare occurrences of *vidatha* with *sabhā* and *samiti* indicate that there is little institutional connection between them. Moreover, all of about twenty mentions of *vidatha* in the Atharvan hymns are absolutely independent of these two well-known political institutions. Furthermore, there is no allusion either to the *vidatha* taking part in the choice of the king, or to the political deliberations of the tribe taking place in it. No reference in the whole range of the Vedic literature points to the *vidatha*’s tribal character and moreover the fact that it is not associated with political institutions and political activities strongly weakens the case for its being interpreted as the “parent folk-assembly” or the “earliest folk-assembly of the Indo-Āryans”. On the other hand, it appears to have been a local body without any political connotation and to have performed no political functions.

All the four references to *vidatha* in the *R̥g Veda* in connection with the *sabhā* and the *samiti* have religious connotations. In fact, most of the 97 verses which refer to the *vidatha* have a religious flavour about them. In not a single hymn is *vidatha* disassociated from the gods,—Soma, the Maruts, Ūṣā, Agni, Mitra, Varuṇa, Aryaman, Indra, Pūṣan, Savitr̥, Aramati, Bhaga, Rodasī, Sūrya, Candra, R̥bhukṣan, the Aśvins, Jātavedas, Vaiśvānara and the Viśvedevas are the heroes and heroines of the *vidatha*. Indra, Mitra and Varuṇa are the emperors (*samrāṭs*) of the *vidatha*. Agni is the *vidatha*’s immortal Hotṛ, and in an Atharvan hymn it is described as the “heaven-gaining *vidatha*.”<sup>2</sup> A number of hymns associate the *vidatha* with the house<sup>3</sup> and the above quotations clearly show the relation of the *vidatha*, “congregation”, and the *yajña*, “sacrifice”. That the former sometimes stood for the sacrifice as such is also indicated by some hymns.<sup>4</sup> A number of passages connect the *vidatha* with three daily sacrifices,<sup>5</sup> thus emphasizing its religious

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nificant; *sādanyam*—belongs to the house; *sabheyam* to the “tribal council”; *vidathyam* occurring between them must refer to a village or settlement, as the Vedic society had no other territorial divisions.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, x, 11, 3 (*vidatha*), 8 (*samiti*)

<sup>2</sup> *AV*, xviii, 1, 15.

<sup>3</sup> *RV*, x, 85, 26, 27; i, 12, 7; x, 100, 6; iii, 1, 18; *AV*, xviii, 1, 20, 21, etc.

<sup>4</sup> *RV*, x, 11, 3; 91, 8; 97, 56; i, 60, 1; x, 96, 1; iii, 1, 18; i, 92, 5; *AV*, xviii, 1, 20; 3, 19; xvii, 1, 15; vii, 77, 4, etc.

<sup>5</sup> *RV*, i, 92, 5; ii, 4, 8; iii, 1, 2; 54, 11; 56, 5; x, 11, 3; *AV*, v, 12, 7; vii, 77, 4.



and local character. Some passages also allude to the sacred grass, Soma-pouring, feasts, wood, *ghee* and milk oblations and inviting the gods to sit on the sacred grass, in connection with the *vidatha*. Thus, they clearly link this institution with the sacrifice and religious rites. Agni is the banner (*ketuh*) and the accomplisher of the sacrifice (*vidatha*),<sup>1</sup> and the Aśvins are its maintainers.<sup>2</sup> In rare cases *vidatha* simply means a mere collection.<sup>3</sup> Numerous occurrences of the *vidatha* in the *R̥g Veda* and *Atharva Veda* and its close association with the sacrifice, worship and the gods, together with its not being linked with any of the tribal bodies, all point to the fact that it was a local congregation of a Vedic settlement, concerned primarily with religious rites and ceremonies. Our consultations with classical historians show that in early societies in Greece and Rome there were no special religious organizations on a tribal basis.<sup>4</sup> The political assemblies, *samiti*, *ecclesia* and *comitia*, performed religious rites as well as their main political functions.

The references to *vidathya*, "one worthy of the congregation", indicate that it was a title for which some qualification was necessary and not all those who attended the synod were called by this designation.<sup>5</sup> One hymn refers to two laud-singing Brāhmaṇas in the *vidatha*<sup>6</sup> and a *R̥g* and an Atharvan hymn refer to poets (*kavayah*) in the *vidatha*.<sup>7</sup> Later, we find Brāhmaṇas with proper names such as *Vidathin*,<sup>8</sup> *Vidathakṛtin*,<sup>9</sup> and the Lexicons interpret the word *vidathya* as "a saint", or an "ascetic".<sup>10</sup> It is then a tempting conclusion that only those Brāhmaṇas who had learned the sacrificial lore and performed the actual sacrifice or assisted in its performance were designated as *vidathyas*. The references to Brāhmaṇas and poets singing in the *vidatha* support this conclusion, which is further confirmed by Brāhmaṇas versed in sacrificial-lore

<sup>1</sup> *R̥V*, x, 91, 8; iii, 1, 18.

<sup>2</sup> *R̥V*, x, 85, 26; *AV*, iii, 77, 4.

<sup>3</sup> *R̥V*, ix, 9, 22.

<sup>4</sup> Professors E. H. Warmington and A.D. Momigliano, both, of the University of London.

<sup>5</sup> *R̥V*, i, 91, 20; 167, 3; iii, 54, 1; iv, 21, 2; vi, 8, 5; vii, 36, 8; 40, 1; 43, 3; x, 41, 1, etc.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, ii, 39, 1; *brāhmāṇeva vidatha uktha śāsā*.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, viii, 39, 1; *AV*, xvii, 3, 19.

<sup>8</sup> Pāṇini, vi, 4, 165.

<sup>9</sup> Sāyaṇa on *R̥V*, v, 33, 9.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Monier Williams, *op. cit.*, s.v. *vidatha*.



being called *vidathya*. Usually in the Vedic hymns *vidatha* thus has the connotation of a "congregation" or "synod".<sup>1</sup> The evidence shows that local congregational meetings were held at which gods were worshipped and the Brāhmaṇas sang hymns in praise of the gods, asking for good luck and prosperity for the settlement.

There is yet another context in which the social aspect of the *vidatha* is revealed. In a long R̥g Vedic hymn the *vidatha* is connected with the welcoming of a bride, and an Atharvan hymn also mentions the *vidatha* in the same context.<sup>2</sup> Here the *vidatha* can hardly mean more than a mere gathering of kith and kin who have come to attend the wedding ceremony which was, as it is today, a socio-religious rite.

Thus the Vedic literature provides no valid evidence for the *vidatha*'s tribal character or its political connotation. The *sabhā* and *samiti* are generally recognized as political institutions, and, according to our findings, the *viś* was also, in its constitutional aspect, a Vedic assembly. This surely leaves little scope for any more political assemblies existing among the simple farming and cattle-breeding communities of the Vedic Aryans. By comparing the Vedic *gaṇa* with the Roman assemblies, Professor Sharma implies that the *gaṇa* was also the same kind of assembly, thus making a total of five assemblies operating during the Vedic period. This, as already stated, was not the case.

The evidence produced and discussed above would show that the *vidatha* had no tribal or national basis and performed no religious, social or political functions for the entire political community. Professor Sharma's claim that the *vidatha* was the "earliest folk-assembly of the Indo-Āryans" which undertook multifarious activities, economic, military, distributive, etc., on behalf of the whole tribe, cannot be substantiated. On the contrary, Vedic literature shows that the *vidatha* was a local congregation performing mainly religious rites and ceremonies for the good luck and prosperity of the settlement. It sometimes prayed in bardic fashion for the victory of the tribe; women participated in its religious ceremonies and rites; it took part in socio-religious ceremonies

<sup>1</sup> R̥V, i, 91, 20; 162, 1; 167, 3, 6; ii, i, 4, 16; 24, 16; iii, 1, 2; 14, 1; 26, 6; 27, 7; 54, 11; 56, 5; iv, 21, 1, 2; v, 29, 13; 63, 2; vi, 8, 1, 5; vii, 36, 8; 43, 3; 57, 2; viii, 39, 1; x, 85, 27; 91, 9; 100, 6, etc.; A V, i, 13, 4; v, 12, 7; xii, 2, 30, etc.

<sup>2</sup> R̥V, x, 85, 26, 27; A V, xiv, 1, 20, 21.

such as weddings in the settlement; the gods were its heroes, and it craved for heroes. In short, it was a local assembly meeting mainly for religious purposes, and perhaps that is the reason why most writers on the political institutions of ancient India have either ignored the *vidatha* completely<sup>1</sup> or have just mentioned it in passing.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> U. N. Ghoshal, *History of Indian Political Ideas*; Majumdar, *Corporate Life*; Shama Sastri, *op. cit.*; Majumdar, ed., *HCIP*, i; B. A. Saletore, *op. cit.*

<sup>2</sup> Jayaswal, *Hindu Polity*, p. 20; Altekar, *State and Government*, p. 141; Ghoshal, *History of Hindu Public Life*, pt. i, p. 28; R. S. Sharma, *Pol. Ideas and Inst.*, pp. 63ff. (gives a fuller treatment); K. P. Mukerji, *op. cit.* pp. 24, 53, etc.; J. W. Spellman, *Pol. Theory of Ant. India*, p. 96; Drekmeier, *op. cit.*, pp. 24, 53, etc.



### CHAPTER THREE

## THE VAJJIAN CONFEDERACY

From the days of Cunningham and Rhys Davids a false idea has persisted regarding the real nature and exact number of the component members of the Vajjian Confederacy. Cunningham asserted that "in the time of Buddha, the Vrijis were divided into several clans, such as the Licchavis, the Vaidehis, the Tirabhuktis, and others, whose names are unknown. The exact number of their clans would appear to have been eight, as criminals were arraigned before the aṭṭhakulaka,<sup>1</sup> or 'eight clans,' which would appear to have been a jury composed of one member from each of the separate divisions of the tribe. Hsüan Tsang mentions that the people of the north called them 'San-fa-shi'<sup>2</sup> or Samvajji, that is the 'United Vajjis,'—and the same name is referred to in the long and interesting account of the people of Wajji, which is given by Turnour<sup>3</sup> from the Pāli Chronicles of Ceylon".<sup>4</sup> We know that the Vajjis were divided into at least two branches—the Licchavis of Vesāli and the Videhas of Mithilā—but there is no contemporary or near-contemporary evidence to support the view that the Tirabhuktis of Tirabhukti were a part of the Vajjian Confederacy. The district later known as Tirabhukti may well have formed part of the territory controlled by the Confederacy, but we have no source which tells us it was called Tirabhukti in the time of the Buddha or even, as Cunningham would have us believe, that a tribe called Tirabhuktis existed.

The term Tirabhukti seems, in fact, to be an administrative one and may not be older than the time of the Guptas, who certainly used the word *bhukti* in the sense of a province. Hsüan Tsang's reference to the northern people calling these people "Samvajjis"

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<sup>1</sup> G. Turnour, *JASB*, vii, p. 993, and fn.

<sup>2</sup> S. Beal, *BRWW*, ii, p. 77, fn. 100; Watters, *On Yuan Chwang*, ii, p. 81, gives "San-fa-chih" (Samvajji), but the Fo-shi-li (Vṛji) does not occur in the *Life of Hiüen Tsiang*, tr. Beal. Probably the pilgrim did not actually visit the Vṛji country. Cf. Watters, *op. cit.*, ii, p. 83.

<sup>3</sup> Turnour, *op. cit.*, p. 992.

<sup>4</sup> *CAGIM*, p. 512.

is too late to be relied upon implicitly.<sup>1</sup> Turnour, in his "Analysis of the Parinibbāna Suttan", refers to them only as "Wajjis" and not as "Samvajjis."<sup>2</sup> He further says that "the Union of the Vajjian States is stated to have consisted of a confederation of chiefs or princes".<sup>3</sup> This should not be taken to support Cunningham's thesis of the "eight clans" forming a confederation.

Rhys Davids also held the view that "the Vajjians included eight confederate clans, of whom the Licchavis and the Videhans were the most important."<sup>4</sup> He gives no source for his claim but we presume that he also held this view on the authority of Turnour, who is quoted a few pages earlier.<sup>5</sup> Legitimate doubt is thus cast upon the possibility of "so complicated a procedure being actually followed" in the Vajjian legal system.<sup>6</sup> Later scholars have nearly always written of "the eight confederate tribes of the Vajjians" on the basis of Rhys Davids, without noting that the originator of the theory was Cunningham. The theory has been virtually unquestioned.

Following Rhys Davids, almost all scholars have held the view, as if unquestionable, that the Vajjian Confederacy consisted of eight confederate clans. We mention only two of the most recent works; that of Drs. S. B. Chaudhuri<sup>7</sup> and M. S. Pandey.<sup>8</sup> The former states that "the Videhas along with the Licchavis, the Jñātṛkas, the Ugras, the Bhaggas and others were some of the constituent confederate clans (*aṣṭakula*), [of] the Vajjis."<sup>9</sup> We find no evidence whatsoever for the inclusion of "the Ugras, the Bhaggas and others" in the Vajjian Confederacy. This is an obvious attempt to find enough names to make up the traditional number of eight. Dr. Pandey, on the authority of H. C. Raychaudhuri,<sup>10</sup> also made the "Vajjian Confederacy consist of eight members of which the Licchavis were most important, and Videhas also being

<sup>1</sup> Beal, *BRWW*, ii, p. 77, fn. 100; Watters, *op. cit.*, ii, p. 81.

<sup>2</sup> Turnour, *op. cit.*, p. 992, and fn.

<sup>3</sup> *Loc. cit.*; Turnour mistakenly calls them of the "Lichchawi dynasty" and wrongly identified "Wesāli" with "Allahabad."

<sup>4</sup> Rhys Davids, *Buddhist India*, pp. 25-6.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>6</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>7</sup> S. B. Chaudhuri, *Ethnic Settlements in Ancient India*, pp. 164-5; see also B. C. Law, *TAI*, p. 239; *KCBI*, pp. 4, 60.

<sup>8</sup> M. S. Pandey, *Historical Geography and Topography of Bihar*, pp. 140-1.

<sup>9</sup> Chaudhuri, *Ethnic Settlements*, pp. 164-5.

<sup>10</sup> H. C. Raychaudhuri, *PHAI*, p. 118; and fn.



one of them.”<sup>1</sup> Again following Raychaudhuri,<sup>2</sup> he states that the Vajjis might also have been a tribe like the Licchavis and the Videhas. The suggestion is probable and we are inclined to suggest the same thing, yet there is no positive evidence to support this claim.

We have found that the Vajjis are more frequently mentioned than the Licchavis in the Buddhist Canon and the Sanskrit literature while there is no mention at all of the Vajjis in the Jaina literature, but only of the Licchavis.<sup>3</sup> These references to the Vajjis suggest that they were also an independent tribe like the other two known tribes of the Confederacy. They may have been the most powerful tribe in the region later occupied by the Licchavis. In the Sanskrit version of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* we find *vr̥jiṣu janapadeṣu* mentioned at least six times.<sup>4</sup> This might suggest that the region which the Confederacy occupied was also named after the Vajjis. Parallels to this can be suggested from China being named after the Chins, Germany after the Germani, France after the Franks, Britain after the Britons. These geographical names persisted long after the tribes had lost their identity, and the areas covered by the names expanded in the course of time.

In our opinion the theory of the confederating clans of the Vajjians being eight is false and the ancient sources do not contradict this conclusion. Buddhaghosa is the only source on which the theory is based.<sup>5</sup> He refers to the *aṭṭhakulikas* of the Vajjis as one of the legal tribunals of Vesāli. It in no way follows that the eight component *kulas* of this tribunal were tribes. *Kula* has rather the sense of clan or family group and if these were tribes one would rather expect *jana*. The *aṭṭhakulikas* seem more likely to have been a body composed of the heads of eight leading families of Vesāli than of eight confederate tribes. We have not been able to trace the occurrence of the compound *aṭṭhakulika* in any Pāli, Sanskrit or Prākṛit sources except the single reference in Buddhaghosa's *Sumaṅgala Vilāsinī*. This is surely an inadequate basis for the generally held theory of the eight tribes of the Vajjian Confederacy.

Moreover, the Jaina traditions, while confirming the existence of

<sup>1</sup> Pandey, *op. cit.*, pp. 140-1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 119-20.

<sup>3</sup> *Abhidhāna Rājendra*, s.v. Licchāi.

<sup>4</sup> *MPS*, pp. 162, 172, 178, 190, 202 and 228.

<sup>5</sup> *Sum. Vil.*, ii, p. 519; cf. *DPPN*, ii, p. 813, fn. 1.



a confederation of some kind, in no way confirm its consisting of eight tribes, but suggest a much larger combination. The Jaina *Kalpa Sūtra* refers to a set combination of the Mallas, the Licchavis and the *gaṇarājās* of Kāśi-Kosala.<sup>1</sup> This formula, which is also to be found in other Jaina sources,<sup>2</sup> is not altogether clear, but seems to mean "the nine Mallas, the nine Licchavis, indeed the eighteen tribal chiefs of Kāśi-Kosala." Whether the total is 36 or 18 (the 18 chiefs of the last phrase being the total of the Mallas and Licchavis in the previous phrases), it is certainly not eight and gives no support to the accepted theory. Though the Jaina scriptures have admittedly been subject to interpolation and emendation, they seem certainly closer to the period they represent than does Budhaghosa, who in any case nowhere states that the Vajjian Confederacy consisted of eight confederated tribes.

We believe that there was no fixed number of Confederates of the Vajjian League. In conclusion, on the authority of the evidence, we propose that the sources prove the inclusion of the following tribes in the Confederation—the Licchavis of Vesālī,<sup>3</sup> the Videhas of Mithilā,<sup>4</sup> the Nāyas of Kuṇḍapura,<sup>5</sup> the Mallas of Pāvā and Kusinārā<sup>6</sup> and the Vajjis. We shall give our reasons for this in discussing the history of each tribe.

Apart from these tribes, we have no evidence that other republics were included in the Vajjian Confederation, but the Jaina formula can be interpreted to prove that some Kāśi-Kosalans were also connected with the Vajjian Confederacy. It is not improbable that some Kāśi-Kosalan chiefs threw in their lot with the Confederacy after Viḍūḍabha came to power, but their association would not have lasted long, as Ajātasattu soon destroyed the Confederacy itself.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Kalpa Sūtra*, p. 65; *nava mallaiṃ nava lecchaiṃ kāśikosalasya aṭṭhārasi vi gaṇa-rāyāṇo*. Jacobi's text is used throughout, if not noted otherwise.

<sup>2</sup> *Niryāvalikā*, Warren, ed., pp. 27-8; the same formula occurs at least four times.

<sup>3</sup> *Dīgha*, (PTS ed. used), ii, pp. 164ff.; *Kalpa Sūtra*, p. 65; *Niryāvalikā*, pp. 27-8; cf. below, pp. 86ff.

<sup>4</sup> *Niryāvalikā*, pp. 27-8; *Kalpa Sūtra*, p. 65; cf. below, pp. 136ff.

<sup>5</sup> *Sūtra Kṛt.*, i, p. 2; iii, p. 22; *Uvāsagadasāo*, i, sec. 69; see below, pp. 159ff.

<sup>6</sup> *Niryāvalikā*, pp. 19ff; *Dīgha*, ii, pp. 164ff; cf. below, pp. 169ff.

<sup>7</sup> Also, see Y. Mishra, *An Early History of Vaiśālī*, pp. 103-23 for a different interpretation of the Confederation. Cf. below, pp. 85ff., for details of each confederate republic.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE LICCHAVIS

The Licchavis formed the most powerful constituent of the Vajjian Confederacy<sup>1</sup> and Vesāli was the centre of their power.<sup>2</sup> At the time of the Buddha they rivalled the power of Magadha, and their capital, the metropolis of the Confederacy, was one of the biggest and most famous cities of India. Mahāvira, the 24th Tīrthaṅkara of the Jainas, was born not far from Vesāli, and the Śākya-muni, the founder of Buddhism, often visited it. It is no wonder then that in the Jaina and Buddhist literature we find very frequent mention of the Licchavis, their origin, their country, their government, their judicial system, and their relations with neighbouring peoples. Thus, we know comparatively more about them than about any other republican peoples of the time.

#### *Name and Etymology*

The first scholar to propose the etymology of the word Licchavi was the Buddhist commentator, Buddhaghosa (c. A.D. 450-500).<sup>3</sup> He gives two derivations of the term. Both etymologies might have satisfied the intellectual curiosity of fifth century folk or even those of mediaeval times, despite the fact that they are fanciful, unscientific and unscholarly. Several modern historians who have written about the Licchavis discuss their non-monarchical form of government and their elaborate and complicated procedure of administering justice, but none has suggested a reasonable and scientific derivation of the name of the people whose peculiar form of government they so admire.

The name occurs in various forms throughout the Pāli Canon, and in Jaina texts, Sanskrit literature, Chinese sources and Gupta inscriptions. In the *Divyāvadāna*,<sup>4</sup> and to a lesser degree in the Pāli Canon and the Gupta inscriptions,<sup>5</sup> the standard form is

<sup>1</sup> Cf. pp. 123ff.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. pp. 98ff.

<sup>3</sup> *Par. Jot.*, i, pp. 158-65; *Pap. Sūd.*, i, 258ff.

<sup>4</sup> *Divyāvadāna*, pp. 55 6, 136.

<sup>5</sup> Fleet, *CII*, iii, pp. 8, 27, 43, 50, etc.

*Licchavi*. Kauṭilya,<sup>1</sup> Manu,<sup>2</sup> the Bhitari inscription of Skanda Gupta<sup>3</sup> and the spurious Gayā grants of Samudra Gupta<sup>4</sup> give the word with the vowel 'i' instead of 'a' in the second syllable, viz. *Licchivi*. In the *Mahāvastu* the usual spelling is *Lecchavi*.<sup>5</sup> The Chinese translators of the Buddhist Sanskrit literature also employ characters which indicate that they knew the word in two forms: *Licchavi* and *Lecchavi*.<sup>6</sup> This form bears a very close resemblance to the Prākṛit form *Licchāi* that is found in the Jaina Canon, which probably contains material transmitted from a period before the time of Candragupta Maurya.

Although the word *Licchavi* occurs in no less than four forms, the majority of scholars have accepted *Licchavi* as standard on the authority of the Pāli Canon, the *Divyāvadāna* and the Gupta inscriptions.<sup>7</sup> Trusting the same sources and the previous authorities, we also accept the standard form *Licchavi*. In order to establish the derivation of the term, Buddhaghosa gives a particular legend about the origin of the Licchavis. Briefly, the story tells how the Queen of Banaras brought forth a lump of flesh instead of a normal baby, which she then hurried to lose in the currents of the Ganges. A hermit caught the basket and looked after the lump. Within six weeks it developed into a boy "yellow like gold," and a girl "white as silver." By the strength of his compassion and the warmth of his affection, the fingers of the hermit were changed into breasts. From them milk passed into the babies like a "clear nectar into a Maṇi jewel." Since both inside and out the brilliance<sup>8</sup> of their skins was the same, the hermit gave the children the name of *Licchavi*. Buddhaghosa mentions other possible interpretations of the name as meaning "thin-skin" (*Līna-chavī*) or even as "in the same skin" or with "no-skin" (*Ni-cchavī*), in connexion with these two children.<sup>9</sup> These interpretations may be a metaphorical exag-

<sup>1</sup> *Arthaśāstra*, bk. xi, pp. 376-9.

<sup>2</sup> Manu, x, 22.

<sup>3</sup> Fleet, *CII*, iii, p. 53.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 256.

<sup>5</sup> *Mahāvastu*, i, p. 254.

<sup>6</sup> Watters, *BRWW*, ii, p. 77.

<sup>7</sup> S. Lévi, *La Népal*, ii, pp. 85-90; *DPPN*, ii, pp. 779-82; Altekar, *State and Government*, pp. 125ff; Rhys Davids, *Buddhist India*, pp. 19ff; Majumdar, *Corporate Life*, pp. 221ff.; Jayaswal, *Hindu Polity*, pp. 40ff.; Law, *TAI*, p. 294, etc.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Lévi, *op. cit.*, ii, pp. 89ff.

<sup>9</sup> *Par. Jot.*, i, pp. 158-65. For text of the passage, see Appx. A, p. 244.



generation implying very fair complexion. If taken literally they do not make sense—can there be children with no skin?

In connection with this, Sylvain Lévi comments that the story of Buddhaghosa is an obvious attempt to connect the name with the word *chavī*, meaning *brilliance*, and points to the similarity of this legend with another in the *Mahābhārata* recording the birth of the one hundred sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra.<sup>1</sup> Other than noting this similarity, Lévi neither suggests an alternative etymology for the term, nor comments further on Buddhaghosa's interpretation. Prof. Rhys Davids,<sup>2</sup> D. R. Bhandarkar,<sup>3</sup> K. P. Jayaswal,<sup>4</sup> R. C. Majumdar,<sup>5</sup> B. C. Law,<sup>6</sup> Malalasekera<sup>7</sup> and A. S. Altekar<sup>8</sup> say nothing about the term except to mention it and discuss the various forms in which it occurs. Those who give the etymology (Sylvain Lévi, Malalasekera and Law) only report the derivation suggested by Buddhaghosa. In this connection B. C. Law simply says that "the word (Licchavi) is rather peculiar and defies easy analysis by the ordinary rules of grammar—hence the mythological interpretation by the commentator".<sup>9</sup> The etymology given by Buddhaghosa is evidently mythological, legendary and divorced from historical fact. It is, however, the only etymology we have. During the last 1,500 years no scholar has tackled the problem, and a solution seems long overdue.

Following Smith's suggestion that the Licchavis represented an intrusive Mongol element in the Indian population it might be thought that the word was of non-Indian origin, but after consultation with competent authorities we can find no counterpart of this word in Tibeto-Burman languages.

We suggest<sup>10</sup> that the name Licchavi is an Indo-Aryan one, the Sanskrit equivalent of which would be *Ṛkṣavin*. *Ṛkṣa* means "bear",<sup>11</sup> and in Māgadhī Prākṛit might take the form *liccha*. The form

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, ii, p. 89; *cf.* *DPPN*, ii, p. 782.

<sup>2</sup> *Buddhist India*, pp. 17ff.

<sup>3</sup> *Car. Lec.*

<sup>4</sup> *Hindu Polity*, pp. 40ff.

<sup>5</sup> *Corporate Life*.

<sup>6</sup> *SKTAI*.

<sup>7</sup> *DPPN*, ii, pp. 779-82.

<sup>8</sup> *State and Government*.

<sup>9</sup> *SKTAI*, p. 18.

<sup>10</sup> I am indebted to my teacher Professor Basham, for this suggestion.

<sup>11</sup> Monier Williams, *op. cit.*, s.v.

*Licchavi* which we find in the sources, is consistent with Prākṛit of the eastern variety.<sup>1</sup> We suggest that the Licchavis were a people who came down to the plains from the mountainous region north of the Ganges. The region abounded in *licchas* or bears (Hindi *rīch*), and hence the inhabitants took up or were given the name of Licchavis. We have no reference to them in the Vedic literature prior to the Buddhist period. If they were, as we believe, an Aryan tribe, they must have changed their name when they migrated to the Himālayan foothills. There is ground to suppose from their well-developed republican institutions and their refined system of judicial administration at the time of the Buddha, as well as their equal status with the Kurus, the Pāñcālas, etc., in the *Arthaśāstra*,<sup>2</sup> that they had a long previous history.

Although our etymology gives the correct form of their name as *Rkṣavi* we have no evidence that they were ever commonly referred to as such, and, on our hypothesis, their name passed very early into literary Sanskrit and Pāli in its Prākṛit form. Therefore, we prefer to refer to them by their usual appellation of *Licchavis*.

### Origin

V. A. Smith believed that the "Licchavis were really a Tibetan tribe which settled in the plains during pre-historic times."<sup>3</sup> In his opinion, "much more significant are the undoubted similarities between the customs of the Tibetans and those of the Licchavis, which are recorded in the important matters of sepulture and judicial procedure."<sup>4</sup> He further adds, "it will be observed that in Tibet, as at Vaiśālī, cremation, burial and exposure are all practised. Similarly, the Mongols are said to dispose of their dead in all these ways."<sup>5</sup> Smith bases this argument on the authority of Turnour<sup>6</sup> and Sarat Chandra Das,<sup>7</sup> and comments that "one will agree with

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Appx. B, p. 245.

<sup>2</sup> Chap. xi, p. 279.

<sup>3</sup> *IA*, xxxii, p. 233. We do not consider here another rather fantastic theory of S. C. Vidyabhusana that the Licchavis were of Iranian origin (*IA*, xxxvii, 1908, pp. 78ff.), since this is evidently impossible. The old theory of B. H. Hodgson, that the Licchavis were "Scythians" (*Collected Essays*, pp. 17ff.) seems equally impossible in the light of our present-day knowledge of the Śakas and other central Asian invaders of India.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 233.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 234.

<sup>6</sup> *JASB*, 1838, pp. 993ff.

<sup>7</sup> Das never contributed such an article on the "Tibetan Jails and Criminal



him (Das) after reading both these accounts (of Turnour and Das) that the ancient procedure at Vaiśālī is substantially identical with the modern procedure at Lhāsā.”<sup>1</sup> We are unable to trace the article by Das on which Smith based his hypothesis, and it seems never to have been published. Moreover, no theory can be soundly established merely by comparing an ancient system with a modern one. The detailed legal procedure of ancient Vesālī may well have been a mere ideal in the mind of the commentator Buddhaghosa, based on a tradition transmitted over centuries and containing recollections of a legal system which was actually much more simple.

Smith makes only one other significant point in favour of the Tibetan origin of the Licchavis. This is their system of exposure of the dead for which he finds Tibetan parallels. The argument is quite inconclusive as it may equally well be used in favour of their Persian origin. Furthermore, four different ways of disposing of the dead, one of which was exposure, were known to the Vedic people.<sup>2</sup> Exposure was also so widespread among ancient and primitive peoples that no valid inferences can be drawn from it. From these arguments it is extremely difficult to associate the Licchavis with the Tibetans.

H. C. Raychaudhuri argued that “the Licchavis, though originally non-Aryans, or foreigners, ranked as Kshatriyas, when they were admitted into the fold of Brāhmanism like the Dravidians referred to in Manu’s śloka and the Gurjara-Pratihāras of mediaeval times.”<sup>3</sup> We have suggested above that there is no solid evidence to prove that the Licchavis were either non-Aryans or foreigners. Raychaudhuri’s view is not acceptable.

In this question the crucial point seems to have been missed. We cannot determine the origin of a people unless we can link them to a certain ethnic group or linguistic category. The fact that the word Licchavis seems to be of Indo-European origin, suggests that they had at least some Aryan blood or had come much under Aryan influence. The Aryans had been moving eastwards by stages since they entered India. There were also associations with non-Aryan

Punishment” in the *JASB*. See *Index of Publications of the Society* 1788-1953, i, pt. 1, 1956, under S. C. Das, pp. 84-6.

<sup>1</sup> Smith, *IA.*, xxxii p. 235.

<sup>2</sup> *AV*, xviii, 2, 34; xii, 3, 22.

<sup>3</sup> *PHAI*, p. 123.



elements of the Indian population, to which the stocks that had migrated to the greatest distances were especially exposed. This may have played some part in the fact that the *Prācyas*, or easterners, were referred to "in a hostile or contemptuous tone." The writer of the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* and Manu refer to the *Prācyas* and the Licchavis respectively, in such a tone.<sup>1</sup> This may also show that the Licchavis had customs of which people raised in the Vedic tradition did not approve; hence they are absolutely neglected in the pre-Buddhist period.

Oldenberg says that "a series of the most important race-names given in the *Rik-Saṃhitā* have vanished wholly, or as good as wholly, in the *Brāhmaṇa*: e.g., the Pūrus, Turvaṣas, Yadus, Tritsus, and so on. Vice-versa, of the names of Kurus and Pāñcālas, which stand in the front in the *Brāhmaṇa*, not one is named directly at least, in the *Saṃhitā*. There arose apparently, on the one side new names instead of the old (note the well-known change of Krivi and Pāñcāla), and on the other, in the many migrations and struggles in numerous places, the countless small stocks of the older days cohered into few greater peoples; naturally such events might easily necessitate a change in the names."<sup>2</sup> It is by no means impossible that the Licchavis were a branch of some well known Vedic tribe which changed its name as a result of migration. Furthermore, a passage in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* refers to the earlier customs and institutions of the Licchavis, thus making them an older people. The Buddha says that they will prosper "so long as they enact nothing already established, abrogate nothing that has been already enacted, and act in accordance with the ancient institutions of the Vajjians, as established in former days".<sup>3</sup>

There is yet another point which strongly supports the view that the Licchavis were linked with the Indo-Aryans. Throughout the Pāli literature the Licchavis are called by the *gotra*-names of the Brāhmaṇas, indicating the close connection of the two. Rhys Davids' comment is pertinent in regard to this. He states that "all that we can fairly conclude is that the clans claimed, by the very use of these names (gottas), to be descended from the same ancestors as the Brahmans, who also bore the names; and that the claim

<sup>1</sup> Oldenberg, *Buddha*, p. 394.

<sup>2</sup> *Buddha*, pp. 401-05.

<sup>3</sup> *Dīgha*, ii, p. 74.



was admitted to be well founded".<sup>1</sup> Of course, in later times many non-Aryan peoples accepted the *gotra*-system. But from this it is clear that the Licchavis, like other peoples of northeast India, were at least greatly influenced by the Aryan way of life and followed some of their customs. This strongly points to their kinship with the Indo-Aryan group of people.

The most probable origin of the Licchavis, as we envisage it, is that they were an Aryan tribe or a branch of one, originally called by a different name. During the Brāhmaṇa period, when the Kuru-Pāñcāla area became too congested and when kings became more autocratic, there was a considerable migration to the east. This is evident from the story of Videgha Māthava contained in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*.<sup>2</sup> The Licchavis broke away from their kinsfolk and moved eastwards to find a better home. They most probably moved along the Himālayan foothills as suggested by Grierson,<sup>3</sup> Rhys Davids,<sup>4</sup> and Kosambi.<sup>5</sup> Grierson pointed out the important fact that, even now, the dialects of Rājasthān have a close resemblance to those spoken along the Himālayas, not only in Nepal but as far west, at least, as Campā. This would tend to show that their ancestors must have been living close together when they began their wanderings to the east along the foot of the mountains from the Panjab or northwest by way of Kosala to the Sakyan country, and thence through Tirhut to Magadha and Aṅga. In the south they went down the Indus and up to Avantī. Both started from the northern Panjab, and probably neither migration followed the Ganges route.<sup>6</sup>

We suggest, therefore, that the Licchavis, before descending to the Videhan country, stayed in the hills in some region of the Nepalese Terāi as if watching the political developments in Videha and the neighbouring region. They might have reached this region about the time that Janaka was ruling over Mithilā (8th-7th century B.C.). As they stayed in a region which abounded in bears and had broken off from their earlier folk, they dropped their older

<sup>1</sup> *Digha*, tr. i, p. 196, (*Intro. to the Mahāli Sutta*); cf. Oldenberg, *Buddha*, p. 414.

<sup>2</sup> *Śat., Br.*, i, 4, 1-10; cf. Oldenberg, *Buddha*, p. 398.

<sup>3</sup> *JRAS*, 1901, p. 808.

<sup>4</sup> *Buddhist India*, pp. 32-3.

<sup>5</sup> *Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, pp. 116ff.

<sup>6</sup> Grierson, *op. cit.*, p. 808; cf. *Buddhist India*, pp. 32-3.



name and started calling themselves by a new name—the Licchavis. They soon advanced south towards the Ganges and first occupied the region of Videha, then Vesāli, the land previously controlled by the Videhas.<sup>1</sup> The Licchavian concentration of power at Vesāli was most probably the second and final stage in their search for a new home. Before the Licchavis occupied Vesāli it was an insignificant place, but it became the biggest city, the stronghold and the capital of the Licchavis. The Ganges separated them from the Magadhan Kingdom, and occasional feuds between these two great and rival powers persisted. They may well have annoyed the Magadhan king over a Ganges port held by them in common. This port is reported by Buddhaghosa to have been a bone of contention between the Licchavis and Ajātasattu.<sup>2</sup> Both Bimbisāra and his son are said to have been hostile to them.<sup>3</sup> Ajātasattu's fortification at Pāṭaligāma was mainly designed to check the Vajjian invasions<sup>4</sup> and the campaigns against Ajātasattu were directed from Vesāli, the metropolis of the confederacy.<sup>5</sup>

\* Our theory seems to place the Licchavis in the proper historical context and explains the silence of the pre-Buddhist sources about them. Smith's suggestion of their Tibetan origin, seems less substantial than our theory that they were an offshoot of the Brāhmanic peoples of Madhyadeśa. Though this is admittedly based chiefly on the slender evidence of the etymology of their name, it fits the known historical facts of the period better than any other hypothesis.

If our hypothesis about the derivation of Licchavi is accepted, some scholars may be inclined to see in this word evidence of totemism. We should note that according to Buddhist tradition the Mauryas, said to be survivors of the massacre of the Sakyas, took their name similarly from the most striking wild life in the territory in which they settled. We see no need to postulate survivals of totemism in these names, unless perhaps in the most attenuated sense, since there is no clear evidence of true totemism anywhere in the whole Vedic and Buddhist literature.

<sup>1</sup> Basham, *Ājivikas*, p. 5; Bhandarkar, *Car. Lects.*, p. 156.

<sup>2</sup> *Sum. Vil.*, ii, p 516; cf. Basham, *Ājivikas*, pp. 71ff.

<sup>3</sup> See below, pp. 121ff.

<sup>4</sup> *Dīgha*, ii, pp. 86ff; *Mahāvagga*, pp. 243-4.

<sup>5</sup> *Niryāvalikā*, pp. 27ff.



*Licchavis versus Vajjis*

In telling his fantastic story of the origin of the Licchavis, Buddhaghosa<sup>1</sup> adds that as the children grew and took up too much of the hermit's time, it was left to the neighbouring villagers to bring them up. The other children disliked them, saying they were to be avoided (*vajjitabbā*) because of their quarrelsome dispositions. It was because of this that they also came to be called Vajjis.

Buddhaghosa's interpretation is obviously fantastic, but the fact remains that these people are referred to both as Licchavis and Vajjis. Pāṇini includes Vṛjis among his *āyudhajīvi-saṅghas* or "societies of professional fighting men."<sup>2</sup> Kauṭilya includes them immediately after the Licchavis in his list of "communities living by the title of *rājās*."<sup>3</sup> They are referred to by both names throughout the vast range of the Buddhist literature. As far as we know, nobody has investigated the relative frequency in the occurrences of these words. Although these are works of literature and not of history, an inquiry into this question would be interesting as well as historically significant. Was there some political reason for calling them Licchavis at one place and Vajjis at another, according to the context?

Rhys Davids twice calls them "the powerful confederation of the Licchavis"<sup>4</sup> and once "the powerful Vajjian Confederacy."<sup>5</sup> Jayaswal refers to them by both names indiscriminately,<sup>6</sup> as do B.C. Law<sup>7</sup> and D. R. Bhandarkar.<sup>8</sup> R. C. Majumdar also employs both terms, but uses only "Licchavi" while making his own statements about them.<sup>9</sup> Altekar refers to them mainly as Licchavis<sup>10</sup> and he does not seem to believe that there was a more or less permanent confederation of republics.<sup>11</sup> Professor Basham calls them "Licchavis" when referring to one of the confederates and "Vajjian

<sup>1</sup> *Par. Jot.*, i, p. 160. For the text see Appx. A, p. 244; *cp. Pap. Sūd.*, i, p. 259.

<sup>2</sup> *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, iv, 2, 131.

<sup>3</sup> *Arthaśāstra*, p. 378; *Licchavika-vṛjika-mallaka-madraka-kukura-kurupāñ-cālādayo rājāśabdopajīvinah*.

<sup>4</sup> *Buddhist India*, pp. 25, 260.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>6</sup> *Hindu Polity*, pp. 45, 48, 51ff.

<sup>7</sup> *TAI*, pp. 294ff; *SKTAI*, pp. 3-98; *SCBI*, pp. 1-136.

<sup>8</sup> *Car. Lec.*, p. 154.

<sup>9</sup> *Corporate Life*, pp. 221-28, 231, 373, 375.

<sup>10</sup> *State and Government*, pp. 114, 121, 124, 127, 132, 137, etc.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

Confederacy" with reference to all the confederates.<sup>1</sup> Dr. A. K. Warder<sup>2</sup> similarly makes a very clear distinction between the use of the words when he says "the famous Licchavis and their Vajjian Confederates," "Vajjian Confederacy,"<sup>3</sup> and "Magadha, the most powerful monarchy, and the Vajjis, the most powerful republican Confederacy."<sup>4</sup> We believe that this discriminate use of the words is historically correct.

We have made a careful study of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* and have compared the Sanskrit and the Pāli texts. Our examination reveals that in the Pāli text they are referred to as Vajjis 78 times and Licchavis only 18 times. In the corresponding Sanskrit text they are referred to 82 times as Vṛjis and only 14 times as Licchavis. Moreover, the Sanskrit text refers in 6 instances to the wanderings of the Buddha near Vesāli as in *Vṛjiṣu janapadeṣu*,<sup>5</sup> and reference is twice made to the *Vṛjibhūmi*<sup>6</sup> and the *Vṛjigrāmakeṣu*<sup>7</sup> in each case, and once to *Vṛjigrāmaka*.<sup>8</sup>

The first passage of the Pāli text resembles word for word the Sanskrit one, and both use the word *Vajji* (Sanskrit *Vṛji*). In the second paragraph the Pāli text contains Ajātasattu's soliloquy—"I will strike at these Vajjians, mighty and powerful though they be, I will root out these Vajjians, I will destroy these Vajjians, I will bring these Vajjians to utter ruin".<sup>9</sup> The corresponding Sanskrit passage has inserted *pariṣadi vācam (bhāṣate)* and continues almost as in the Pāli passage but with a significant difference. The Sanskrit passage uses *Vṛjīn* only once, whereas the Pāli text has *Vajjī* four times. The omission in the Sanskrit version may be intended for literary effect but the Pāli passage better fits the situation presented. Here Ajātasattu's bitterness speaks aloud in the Pāli version and we think it is more authentic than the Sanskrit one. On the first page of the text *Vajjī* occurs 5 times in the Pāli version and only twice in its Sanskrit counterpart.<sup>10</sup> The Sanskrit phrase *Vṛjiṣu*

<sup>1</sup> *Ājīvikas*, pp. 5, 73-5.

<sup>2</sup> In Philips, *op. cit.*, pp. 44-56.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>5</sup> *MPS*, pp. 162, 172, 178, 190, 202, 228.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 204.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 192.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 230.

<sup>9</sup> *MPS*, p. 102; *Dīgha*, ii, p. 72.

<sup>10</sup> *Loc. cit.*



*Janapadeṣu*, which occurs at least six times in the text, however, has no Pāli equivalent.<sup>1</sup>

Altogether, the relative frequency of the term *Vajji* is greater than that of *Licchavi*. The former seems to imply more than the Licchavis alone. At the time of the Buddha's death, it was the Licchavis of Vesāli who claimed a share in his relics, not the Vajjians. This may be due to the fact that the latter had no independent existence at the time that the story took its form, as the confederacy of several republics, including the Licchavis, the Videhas, the Mallas, etc., had been destroyed by Ajātasattu. But in all the recensions and versions of the story which we have investigated it is the Vajjis whom Ajātasattu determines to annihilate, not the Licchavis.

The comparison between the prevalence of *Vajji* at the beginning and *Licchavi* at the end of the *Sūtra* suggests that the author of the original version had a clear historical sense. He understood that the Vajjian Confederacy was in the former case intended as a political entity and in the latter case it is the individual confederates, like the Licchavis, Mallas, etc., who were intended.<sup>2</sup> This also suggests that in its earliest form the story was compiled not long after the events to which it refers took place. The Buddha calls the people in question Licchavis only after he has referred to them as *Vesālikā Licchavī*.<sup>3</sup> This is the first time the word Licchavi occurs in the text of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* and it is qualified by *Vesālikā*. Afterwards the Buddha refers to them simply as Licchavis. This, we believe, is quite significant and further shows that while the Licchavis were especially connected with Vesāli, the term Vajji had<sup>4</sup> a wider connotation.

In the *Mahāli Sutta*<sup>4</sup> we have references to two Licchavis; Otthaddha the Licchavi, at least 15 times referred to as Mahāli by the Buddha, and Sunakkhatta of the Licchavis. Here again they are connected with Vesāli. As this *Sutta* has no political relevance they are not referred to as Vajjians. The *Jana-Vasabha Suttanta*<sup>5</sup> reports that "the Exalted One in Nādikā was wont to make declaration as to the rebirth of such followers as had passed away in

<sup>1</sup> For the detailed analysis of the occurrences of Vajji and Licchavi see Appx. C, p. 246.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. below, pp. 132ff.

<sup>3</sup> MPS, p. 178.

<sup>4</sup> *Dīgha*, i, pp. 150ff.

<sup>5</sup> *Dīgha*, ii, pp. 200ff.

death among the tribes round about on every side"; i.e., among the Kāsīs and the Kosalans, the Vajjians and the Mallas, and six other peoples.<sup>1</sup> Here, as the reference has some political significance, there is no mention of the Licchavis but of the Vajjians, and the Mallas who were most probably a powerful confederate. This unmistakably shows that the Licchavis were included in the Vajjians.

Yet even more revealing are some other passages in the *Pāṭika-Suttanta*.<sup>2</sup> They record a conversation between the Buddha and the wanderer Bhaggava about the former's apostate disciple Sunakkhatta of the Licchavis who left the Buddhist *Saṅgha* for the Ājīvikas. During this dialogue the Buddha reports that Sunakkhatta the Licchavi has spoken in the praise of the Buddha and his *Dhamma* and *Saṅgha* "among the Vajjians."<sup>3</sup> This expression is used 4 times and whenever a reference is made to this disciple he is invariably called a Licchavi. Thus, there must have been a difference between the two and, as the context suggests, the word Vajji had the wider connotation.

The *Theragāthā* records Vajji 11 times and Licchavi only once, which the Commentator takes to mean "a Vajjian." "He was reborn as the son of a Licchavi rājā at Vesāli. He became known as the Vajjian's son, because his father was one of the Vajjians."<sup>4</sup> This suggests that in order to be known as a Vajji a Licchavi had to be a *rājā* or member of the Licchavian assembly, some of whom might have represented the Licchavis at the Vajjian council. Further references to the Licchavis of Vesāli are found in the *Cūḷa-Saccaka Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya*.<sup>5</sup> In the *Cann-Ovāda Sutta* of the same text we read of a "Vajjian village,"<sup>6</sup> and in the *Cūḷa-Gosiṅga Sutta*<sup>7</sup> we find a demigod named Dīgha announcing, "It is a great thing for the Vajjians, a very great thing for the Vajjian race, to have dwelling (in their country) the Truth-Finder, Arahāt, All-Enlightened."<sup>8</sup> This may indicate the whole territory

<sup>1</sup> *Dīgha*, ii, p. 200.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, iii, pp. 1ff.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5; *Vajjigāme*, literally "in the village of the Vajjians," i.e., says the commentary of the Vajjian *rājās* at Vesāli.

<sup>4</sup> *Theragāthā Comm.*, i, p. 246; *Vesāliyam Licchavirājaputto hutvā nibbatti. Vajjirājaputtattā vajjiputto*. . . . .; *Psalm of the Brethern*, (PTS), p. 106.

<sup>5</sup> *Majjhima*, i, pp. 227ff.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, ii, p. 266.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, i, pp. 205ff.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, i, p. 210.



of the Confederacy. The *Cūḷa-Saccaka Sutta* informs us of the "confederation and federations such as the Vajjians and the Mallians" who had supreme power within their territories.<sup>1</sup>

### *Geographical Location*

Hsüan Tsang refers to the kingdoms of Vaiśālī (modern Basarh) <sup>2</sup> and Fo-li-shi or Vṛjī <sup>3</sup> separately, with an area of 5,000 li (833 miles) and 4,000 li (667 miles) in circuit respectively. Cunningham has shown the pilgrim's mistake in separating the two states which actually were one with several branches.<sup>4</sup> The two taken separately are certainly too large to be accommodated in the region between the mountains and the Ganges.<sup>5</sup> Cunningham asserts that "it is quite certain that there must be some mistake in the estimated dimensions of one of these. The utmost limit that can be assigned to the joint-districts, with reference to the surrounding states, is not more than 750 or 800 miles in circuit, from the foot of the mountains (in the north) to the Ganges on the south, and from the Gaṇḍaka on the west to the Mahānadi on the east. I conclude, therefore, either that there is some mistake or exaggeration in the estimated size of one or both of the districts, or that the two districts are the same kingdom under different names."<sup>6</sup> That the latter actually was the case he has shown in detail.<sup>7</sup> Cunningham further discusses the area covered by the Licchavis, the Videhas, etc., and shows that this entire region was occupied by the *Sam-vajjis* or "United Vajjis". Moreover, he shows, on the authority of Hsüan Tsang, that "the country of the Vṛjis was long from east to west, and narrow from north to south. This description," he says, "corresponds exactly with the tract of country lying between the Gaṇḍaka and Mahānadi rivers, which is 300 miles in length by 100 miles in breadth."<sup>8</sup>

According to Cunningham, we find the Licchavis of Vesālī occupying "the southwest corner of the country of the Vṛjis to the

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, i, p. 231; *immesam pi bho Gotama samghānam. gaṇānam, seyyatthi-dam Vajjīnam Mallānam*, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Beal, *Life of Hiüen Tsiang*, p. 100.

<sup>3</sup> Beal, *BRWW*, ii, p. 77, fn. 100.

<sup>4</sup> *CAGIM*, pp. 509ff.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 509.

<sup>6</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 509-12.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 513.

westward of the little Gaṇḍaka river and north of the Ganges".<sup>1</sup> The Videhas of Mithilā occupied the northern tracts, and the Nāyas inhabited the land around the northern suburbs of Vesāli.<sup>2</sup> The country occupied by these three main clans was collectively called the *Vṛji-Janapada*.<sup>3</sup>

Dr. M. S. Pandey, relying on Cunningham, locates the Videhas as "bounded on the north by what is now the Nepalese Terai, the Kosi river to the east, the Sadānirā (modern Gaṇḍaka) to the west and the Licchavian territory to the south."<sup>4</sup> Dr. Pandey does not question Cunningham's location of the Licchavis of Vesāli and refers to the whole territory occupied by the confederates as "Vajji-territory".<sup>5</sup> He further shows that the Vajjian territory was bounded on the west, south and east respectively, by three rivers, the Gaṇḍak, the Gaṅgā and the Bāgmatī, while on the north was what had been the kingdom of Videha.<sup>6</sup> We accept this location of the Vajjian territory occupied by the Licchavis of Vesāli as a probable approximation which is not disproved by conflicting evidence.

#### *Government and Organization*

The Licchavis formed what is constitutionally called a *saṅgha* or a *gaṇa*.<sup>7</sup> This was a form of government in which neither a single ruler, nor even a few, but a considerable portion of the population was vested with the final power and ultimate authority of the state. The *gaṇa*, as Kātyāyana<sup>8</sup> and Kauṭilya<sup>9</sup> give us to understand, was tribal in character and its members were generally considered Kṣatriyas.<sup>10</sup> The question as to who formed the Licchavian *gaṇa* (assembly) at Vesāli, has produced several different theories. All the views rest on the basis of the three following sources which we quote before systematically examining the strong and weak points of the theories based upon them.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 511; also see *PHAI*, p. 118.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. above, our map A.

<sup>3</sup> *MPS*, pp. 162, 172, 178, 190, 202, 228; *Majjhima*, i, p. 210.

<sup>4</sup> Pandey, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.

<sup>6</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>7</sup> *Majjhima*, i, p. 231; *immesam pi hi bho Gotama saṅghānam gaṇānam, seyyatthidaṃ Vajjīnam Mallānam*, etc.; cf. *Cīvaravastu*, iii, pt. 2, p. 5; *Vaiśālī gaṇādhinā*.

<sup>8</sup> *Vārṇikā*, iv, 1, 160.

<sup>9</sup> *Arthaśāstra*, chap. xi, pp. 378-81.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Altekar, *State and government*, pp. 112-3.



The preamble to the *Ekaṇṇa-Jātaka* states that "in that city [Vesāli] there were always 7,707 kings [*rājās*] to govern the kingdom, and a like number of viceroys [*uparājās*], generals [*senāpatis*] and treasurers [*bhaṇḍāgārikas*]." <sup>1</sup> The preamble to the *Cullakālīṅga-Jātaka* refers to the same tradition when it says that "the Licchavis of the ruling family to the number of 7,707 had their abode at Vesāli. And all of them were given to argument and disputation." <sup>2</sup> But the *Mahāvastu* presents yet another picture. This text states that there were "twice 84,000 Licchavi *rājās* residing within the city of Vaiśālī". <sup>3</sup>

Twice this last mentioned figure (168,000) certainly seems too large a number for the assembly, but it may suggest that the entire population of the Licchavian capital was more than 7,707. Yet one should not attribute too much weight to such statements, as 84,000 is an oft-quoted number in ancient Indian literature. In our opinion this merely implies that Vesāli was a large city and had many inhabitants. It is difficult to give even an approximate number for the population of Vesāli. When the *Jātaka* author says there were 7,707 kings and a like member of viceroys, generals and treasurers he might be pointing to the entire adult male population of Vesāli. <sup>4</sup> But again, this may indicate no more than that the city of Vesāli was quite populous.

Vesāli was not only the area enclosed within the walls of the city, but also included a wider territory of the suburbs. This is evident from the *Mahāvastu* <sup>5</sup> and the Jaina sources, <sup>6</sup> and from Hsüan Tsang. <sup>7</sup> It suggests a picture not unlike Athens in her heyday or Rome during her Republican period. Athens is said to have had about 40,000 citizens out of a total population of about 400,000, <sup>8</sup> and Rome "had between 40,000 to 90,000 potential voters at election time during the period from the Second Punic to the Third Macedonian War." <sup>9</sup> "A maximum attendance of 4,000 to 10,000

<sup>1</sup> *Jāt.*, i, p. 404.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, iii, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Mahāvastu*, i, pp. 256, 271; *cp.* *Civaravastu*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>4</sup> *Buddhist India*, pp. 18, 33-34.

<sup>5</sup> *Mahāvastu*, i, p. 256; *grāmakṣetrosī*.

<sup>6</sup> *Uvāsagadasāo*, i, p. 3; tr. p. 4 fn. 8; *Niryāvalikā*, pp. 19ff.; *cf.* *PHAI*, pp. 119-20.

<sup>7</sup> Watters, *On Yuan Chwang*, ii, p. 83; *cf.* *CAGIM*, pp. 58off.; Altekar, *Indian Archaeology—A Review*, 1957-8, pp. 10-11; 1958-9, p. 12.

<sup>8</sup> Barker, *op. cit.*, p. 35, fn. 3.

<sup>9</sup> H. H. Scullard, *Roman Politics*, p. 20.



would seem a likely guess, and in practice the number probably was considerably less".<sup>1</sup> In public-spirited Athens the annual meeting of the *ecclesia* for ostracism required a quorum of 6,000 members out of at least 35,000 men, while an attendance of 5,000 at regular meetings was considered a record in difficult war-time conditions.<sup>2</sup>

Keeping our sources in view and also taking note of the more or less contemporary Athens, and the somewhat later Rome, we suggest that the figure of 30,828 ( $7,707 \times 4$ ) of the *Ekaṇṇa-Jātaka* refers to an approximate citizen body (Kṣatriya population) and not to the entire population of the area controlled by the Licchavis. The latter might have been in the region of 200,000-300,000.<sup>3</sup> The figure 7,707 probably refers to a fixed number<sup>4</sup> of people who actually had full political rights and could take their seats in the Vesālian Assembly. Thus, the governing class in the Licchavian republic was, like the Yaudheyas who had 5,000,<sup>5</sup> fairly large. It was as numerous as the corresponding ruling class in Athens and more numerous than at Rome. They need not necessarily always have attended the Assembly, but enjoyed the right to do so and were individually called *rājās*.<sup>6</sup> In fact, no single one of these 7,707 *rājās* had great power.<sup>7</sup> The power rested with the majority, and, as we shall see, it seems that nine councillors carried out the administration and were responsible to the Assembly. Apart from the Licchavi *rājās* and their families, there were artisans, "probably not Licchavis, in each village of the republic, and men of certain special trades of higher standing—the carpenters, smiths, and potters for instance, had villages of their own. So also had the Brāhmaṇas, whose services were in request at every domestic event".<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Thucydides, viii, 72, quoted in Barker, *op. cit.*, pp. 32ff.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Rhys Davids, *Buddhist India*, pp. 18, 33-4.

<sup>4</sup> Like the Greek aristocracies "of fixed number" of 1,000 as among the Locrians, also at Colophon and at Cyme, and of 600 at Syracuse and at Massalia. Cf. Whibley, *op. cit.*, pp. 134ff.

<sup>5</sup> McCrindle, *Alexander's Invasion*, p. 121.

<sup>6</sup> *Lalitavistara*, i, p. 21; *Mahāvastu*, i, pp. 257ff. Quite like the rulers of the "nobles and the Samiti" state; cf. above, p. 58.

<sup>7</sup> *Loc. cit.*; also see Altekar, *State and Government*, pp. 114ff.; Jayaswal, *Hindu Polity*, p. 394; D. R. Chanana, *JBRS*, (spl. issue), ii, p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> *Buddhist India*, pp. 20-21.



Dr. D. R. Bhandarkar, on the authority of the *Jātakas* quoted above, held the view that "every one of these (7,707) Licchavi kings had with him his own viceroy, general and treasurer".<sup>1</sup> He further says that "whether there were as many as 7,707 Licchavi kings ever staying in Vesāli, as the *Jātaka* preambles inform us, is somewhat doubtful. What we may safely infer is that the number of the kings constituting the Licchavi *Gaṇa* was pretty large. It again seems that the Licchavi kings had each his separate principality where he exercised supreme power in certain respects. Except on this supposition it is not intelligible why each should have his own *uparājā*, *senāpati* and *bhaṇḍāgārika*, and act as the magistrate in inflicting punishments." <sup>2</sup>

It seems incredible that so learned a scholar should rely on the preamble of a *Jātaka* to the extent of accepting the historicity of such a fantastic state of affairs. Moreover, the *Jātaka* itself does not say explicitly that each king had these officers attached to him. Bhandarkar obviously does not think it possible that the *Jātaka* writer might have had a subtle sense of humour. It appears to us that the passage should be taken as a sarcastic remark, based on the fact that each member of the Assembly called himself a *rājā*, and each soldier fancied himself a general. This is corroborated by an equally striking statement about the Licchavis in the *Lalitavistara* that "each one thinks: I am king; I am king".<sup>3</sup> The number 7,707, without forgetting the 5,000 of the Yaudheyas,<sup>4</sup> may with little difficulty be accepted as an approximate or even exact number of the Licchavi kings, but it is simply fantastic to assign a "separate principality to each where he exercised supreme power in certain respects," as Bhandarkar suggested. Moreover, the equally large number of *uparājās*, *senāpatīs* and *bhaṇḍāgārikas* is inconceivable. How could the small territory around Vesāli be sliced into 7,707 "separate principalities"?

While Bhandarkar showed too much imagination in his interpretation of this passage, Majumdar did not even think it worth

<sup>1</sup> *Car. Lecss.*, p. 154; also see R. S. Hardy, *A Manual of Buddhism*, p. 235.

<sup>2</sup> Bhandarkar, *Car. Lecss.*, p. 155.

<sup>3</sup> i, p. 21; *Bibl. Indica Series*, chap. iii, p. 23; *ekaika eva manyate aham rājā, aham rājeti*; also see *Mbh.* (Poona Edn.), ii, xiv, 2, Yudhiṣṭhira's remark; *grhe grhe tu rājānaḥ*.

<sup>4</sup> McCrindle, *Alexander's Invasion*, p. 121; also see Altekar, *State and Government*, p. 112.



serious consideration. He lightly remarks that "while the number seven thousand seven hundred and seven may be dismissed as a purely conventional one, it may be accepted that the supreme assembly of the state consisted of a pretty large number of members and must, as such, be held to be a popular one."<sup>1</sup> This judgement does not solve the problem any better than that of Bhandarkar. Moreover, it cannot be assumed from the number in question that the Licchavian Assembly was of necessity a "popular one" without qualifications. Majumdar also comments that "this [the number 7,707 of the kings and others] would imply that each member of the Supreme Assembly possessed a full suite of officers requisite for the administration of the State. It would appear, therefore, that each of these members was the head of an administrative unit. In other words, the whole state consisted of a number of administrative units, each of which was a state in miniature by itself, and possessed a complete administrative machinery."<sup>2</sup> He then compares these "states in miniature" to Athens' division into *demes* after Cleisthenes.<sup>3</sup> Majumdar mainly follows Bhandarkar, but is less adventurous than he. Furthermore, his comparison of the Licchavian territory with the Athenian division into ten *demes* is not warranted by the Indian sources and, if we understand him correctly, he hesitantly implies that the Licchavian republic had 7,707 "states in miniature".<sup>4</sup> Unless the area was far more thickly populated than it is today, which is most unlikely, there was not even one-tenth that number of villages in the entire Licchavian territory. The Licchavian republic, though similar in some aspects to its Athenian counterpart, was certainly not as well-divided and well-organized as the latter, as far as our sources indicate.

B. C. Law states that "it does not appear to have been a completely democratic republic, but an oligarchy, citizenship being confined to members of the confederate clans".<sup>5</sup> He further says that "what the real number of de facto *rājās* was, we do not know".<sup>6</sup> That the Licchavian *saṅgha* or *gaṇa* was not "a completely democratic

<sup>1</sup> Majumdar, *Corporate Life*, p. 228.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 229.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 230.

<sup>4</sup> Whereas the Athenian division was concerned with groupings of equal size often cutting across the old tribal populations, there is no evidence of any such division among the Licchavis.

<sup>5</sup> *TAI*, p. 321.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 321.



republic, but an oligarchy" is unobjectionable, but how could the "confederate clans" be members of the Licchavian republic? The Licchavis themselves were merely one of the confederate members, albeit the most important of the Vajjian League.

Professor Altekar's view that "the Licchavis had a council of 9 though the membership of their Assembly numbered 7,707,"<sup>1</sup> is a fair judgement. It seems obvious from the evidence of contemporary Athens that 7,707 was the number of the Licchavi Khattiyas, all calling themselves *rājās*, who formed the General Assembly. They normally met once a year for important and grave public business.<sup>2</sup> But usually a much smaller body assembled to attend to the administration, meeting for this in the *santhāgāra*.<sup>3</sup> It was a common feature of the republics at the time of the Buddha to have a meeting place like a mote-hall in their capital cities and also in other large towns of the republics.<sup>4</sup> As the Athenian *ecclesia* met at the *pnux*,<sup>5</sup> and the Roman Senate in the *curia*,<sup>6</sup> so the Licchavian *gaṇa* met in the *santhāgāra*.<sup>7</sup> It was not only a political centre but, like the Vedic *sabhā*, also the place where religious and social functions of the republic took place.<sup>8</sup>

At the time of the Buddha this republic was larger in territory than any other. It was almost equal in size to the largest Greek polis of Sparta, which occupied an area of 3,360 square miles.<sup>9</sup> The 7,707 *rājās* appear to have been the heads of Kṣatriya families<sup>10</sup> residing in and about Vesālī.<sup>11</sup> They were all designated *rājās*<sup>12</sup> and their sons were called Licchavi-*kumāras* (princes).<sup>13</sup> On the basis of the meagre evidence we may suggest that the eldest son of the head of the family usually succeeded his father and was referred to

<sup>1</sup> *State and Government*, p. 132; see also *PHAI*, p. 125; *Corporate Life*, p. 232.

<sup>2</sup> See below, pp. 107ff; *cp.* *Cīvaravastu*, pp. 7ff.

<sup>3</sup> *Majjhima*, i, pp. 228, 457, etc.; *Dīgha*, i, p. 91; ii, p. 164, etc.; *cf.* *tr. Dialogues*, i, p. 113, fn. 2.

<sup>4</sup> *Loc. cit.*; *cf.* *Buddhist India*, pp. 19, 20.

<sup>5</sup> Harvey, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 388; *cf.* Heitland, *op. cit.*, pp. 64ff.

<sup>7</sup> *Majjhima*, i, p. 228.

<sup>8</sup> See above, pp. 40ff; *cp.* Altekar, *State and Government*, pp. 127-8.

<sup>9</sup> Barker, *op. cit.*, p. 27; *cf.* Altekar, *State and Government*, pp. 121-2, fn. 2.

<sup>10</sup> *Cp.* *Majjhima*, i, p. 164, refers to Brāhmaṇa heads of families.

<sup>11</sup> *Mahāvastu*, i, p. 257.

<sup>12</sup> *Lalitavistara*, i, p. 21; Kauṭilya, bk. xi; also see above, p. 58.

<sup>13</sup> Bhandarkar, *Car. Lects.*, p. 150.



as *uparājā*.<sup>1</sup> If his father, the *rājā*, was ill or unable to attend an assembly, the *uparājā* (viceroy) might have represented him. Thus, it would appear that only part of the adult population, though a large number, had potential political rights and held state offices. Probably the General Assembly normally met once a year during the Licchavis' annual spring season festival.<sup>2</sup>

It was at annual meetings like this that the Licchavis honoured their elected courtesan Ambapālī.<sup>3</sup> This surprising ceremony of electing the most beautiful woman to be the wife of the whole republic must have taken place during the week of the spring season festivities. The length of her career suggests that she was appointed for life. The *Civaravastu*<sup>4</sup> and the Tibetan *Dulva* preserve the interesting tradition as to how she became a courtesan. From a Kadali tree in an *āmra* grove of Mahānāman, a Licchavi of Vesālī "was born a girl, lovely to look upon, perfect in all parts of her body, and he (Mahānāman) called her name Āmrāpālī (Amra Skyong-ma). When she was grown up, as there was a law at Vaiśālī by which a perfect woman was not allowed to marry, but was reserved for the pleasures of the people, she became a courtesan."<sup>5</sup>

It was probably on this occasion that the *uparājās* whose fathers had died during the year, or had become too old to perform their duties, were given their sacred bath and anointed *rājās*. The auspicious *Pokkharāṇī* was the tank wherein the representatives of the Kṣatriya families of Vesālī were also anointed.<sup>6</sup> The existence of such a tank has been confirmed by the recent excavations carried out at the site by the late Professor Altekar.<sup>7</sup> These revealed the "periphery of an ancient tank about half a mile to the north-west of the ruins of the fortified city of Vaiśālī (*rājā Viśāla kha gaḍa*). The site of the tank (now called Kharaunapokhrā) with a length of 1,420 feet and a width of 660 feet is locally believed to

<sup>1</sup> *Sūtra Kṛi.*, bk. ii, i, 13.

<sup>2</sup> *Kalpa Sūtra*, sec. 128; *cp.* *Civaravastu*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>3</sup> *Civaravastu*, pp. 16ff; *DPPN*, i, pp. 155-6; Whibley, *op. cit.*, p. 121 notes that the Bacchiadae of Greece met once a year to choose their chief. *cp.* E.S. Hartland, *Primitive Law* pp. 26. The Yakuts of N.E. Siberia met once each summer.

<sup>4</sup> *Civaravastu*, pp. 17ff.

<sup>5</sup> *Dulva*, iii, pp. 87-8, quoted in W. W. Rockhill, *Life of the Buddha*, p. 64.

<sup>6</sup> *Jāt.*, iv, p. 148; *Vesālīnagare gaṇarājākulānam-abhiseka-maṅgala Pokkharāṇī*.

<sup>7</sup> *Indian Archaeology — A Review*, 1957-8, pp. 10-11; 1958-9, p. 12.



represent the ancient 'Abhiṣeka-Puṣkariṇī' of the Licchavis in which none but the Licchavi chiefs were allowed to bathe . . .". The excavations proved that "while no wall existed at the top of the tank-embankment, there had been one, 3 feet 4 inches wide along its slope, very near the present-day water level during the month of March . . .". "The original tank of the Licchavis might have been a smaller one, which was subsequently enlarged and surrounded by a wall, represented by its present remains, in about the 2nd century B.C. when the Licchavis might have once more become powerful after the fall of the Mauryan Empire." <sup>1</sup>

The chief officer of the state, the *rājā*, *par excellence* <sup>2</sup> was most probably elected during this week of spring festivities. The sources do not definitely say for what period of time the head of the republic was elected. But the idea does emerge that the *rājās* who constituted the Assembly held their seats for life unless they were physically handicapped or found guilty of some serious crime, such as treason. However, it does not seem possible that the chief *rājā* or president was elected for life.

In the *Niryāvalikā Sūtra* of the Jainas, <sup>3</sup> *rājā* Ceḍaga is represented as an all-powerful king who is assisted by a council of nine kings when he dealt with Licchavian affairs. <sup>4</sup> Actually he was one of the nine Licchavian kings who ruled the republic in the name of the Assembly. <sup>5</sup> The Buddhist works do not even mention Ceḍaga, the king of Vesāli, but they tell us that the governing power of Vesāli was vested in a Senate composed of the nobility and presided over by a king who shared the power with a viceroy, a general-in-chief and a treasurer. <sup>6</sup> In the Jaina books we also find traces of this "curious government" of the Licchavis. <sup>7</sup> In the *Niryāvalikā* Ceḍaga consulted "the 18 confederate kings of Kāśī-Kosala, the nine Licchavis and the nine Mallakis" before taking a final decision against the Magadhan king. <sup>8</sup> Again, on the death of Mahāvīra the 18 confederate kings, mentioned above, instituted a festival com-

<sup>1</sup> Altekar, *Indian Archaeology-A Review*, 1957-8, pp. 10-11; 1958-9, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> *Jāt.*, i, pp. 504ff.

<sup>3</sup> Ed. Gopani and Chokshi, pp. 19ff.; cf. Basham, *Ājīvikas*, pp. 68ff.

<sup>4</sup> Basham, *Ājīvikas*, p. 69.

<sup>5</sup> *Jaina Sūtras*, pt. i, p. xii.

<sup>6</sup> See above, pp. 98-100.

<sup>7</sup> *Jaina Sūtras*, pt. i, p. xii.

<sup>8</sup> See below, "Political History", pp. 123ff.



memorating that event,<sup>1</sup> but no separate mention is made of their pretended sovereign Ceḍaga. It is probable that Ceḍaga was simply one of these confederate kings and their peer. Jacobi seems to belittle Ceḍaga's position, but the emphasis placed upon him in the Jaina texts indicates that at least he headed the Licchavian Council, though no great power was attached to this office. Actual power was vested in the Council of nine. Thus, we may understand why the Buddhists took no notice of him; his influence was not very great and, moreover, was apparently used in the interests of their rivals, the Jains.<sup>2</sup>

The Tibetan tradition also points to the election of the Licchavian chief when it records that "their chief magistrate was called Nāyaka (sde-dpon) and he was elected by the people or rather by the ruling clans of the Licchavis".<sup>3</sup> In our opinion this preserves the authentic tradition that the Licchavi nobles elected a chief from amongst themselves. He was head of the state as well as the supreme judge.<sup>4</sup> Rhys Davids explains his probable status briefly and clearly: "A single chief—how, and for what period chosen, we do not know—was elected as office holder, presiding over the sessions, and, if no sessions were sitting, over the state. He bore the title of *rājā*, which must have meant something like the Roman consul or the Greek archon." <sup>5</sup>

It is probable that the chief officer of the state, also called a *rājā*, was elected from amongst his fellow *rājās* because of his age,<sup>6</sup> political wisdom, strength of character, bravery in battle, eloquence in the assembly and general popularity among the citizens.<sup>7</sup> Normally, for a *rājā* to command such great admiration and affection from his people would imply that he was well into his forties or early fifties. If he was elected at about the age of 40 to 45, he would not have usually acted as chief or president of the republic for more

<sup>1</sup> *Kalpa Sūtra*, sec. 128.

<sup>2</sup> *Mahāvastu*, i, pp. 254ff; refers to Tomara representing the difficulties of the Licchavis to the Buddha.

<sup>3</sup> Rockhill, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

<sup>4</sup> Hardy, *op. cit.*; "They reigned in turn, each for an appointed time" (p. 236).

<sup>5</sup> *Buddhist India*, p. 19.

<sup>6</sup> In Greek "aristocracies of heads of the houses", age enjoyed indirect privilege (Whibley, *op. cit.*, p. 123).

<sup>7</sup> *Cp.* above, pp. 30ff; for the qualifications of a king chosen by the *vis* in the Vedic period.



than 10 to 15 years. In the meantime, some new, rising and popular figure must have replaced him in the public eye. The comparatively short life expectancy which we may assume for the Indian of those days,<sup>1</sup> would suggest that the term of office of a Licchavian *rājā* was fairly brief. It should be remembered that while among the most primitive peoples chiefs hold office for life, the period of chieftainship may be comparatively short, in some cases averaging no more than ten years.<sup>2</sup>

However, in some cases a strong, worthy and popular president might well have continued in his office for a longer period of time covering some 25 to 30 years, but this would be unusual. In the more democratic Athens, Cleisthenes, the founder of that democracy, is said to have governed for 31 years,<sup>3</sup> but such a long period of office was not the general rule. In our opinion it is unlikely that the elected head of the Licchavian *gaṇa* held office for more than 10 to 15 years, except in very exceptional circumstances. The case with the *uparājā* would be similar. But the change in the office of the *bhaṇḍāgārika* might have been less frequent as at that time it would have been difficult to find an experienced and expert treasurer. We do have definite evidence from a Buddhist Sanskrit text, the *Cīvaravastu*, that the *senāpati* was appointed for life.<sup>4</sup> No difficulties seem to have arisen from the life-tenure of the general similar to the events at Rome leading to the Civil Wars. The admiration won by the general during the successful anti-Magadhan campaigns does not seem to have made the assembly fearful of the power he could wield after the immediate threat was over. The Civil Wars in Rome which witnessed the downfall of the Republic were directly caused by the struggles between the all-powerful generals who had been too long retained in office because of this very quality of efficiency in the battlefield.

The opening chapter of the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* states that the Buddha commented on the seven-fold conditions of the Licchavis.<sup>5</sup> It would appear that ideally they "held full and frequent public assemblies," that they met "together in concord," and "rose in concord" and carried out their undertakings in concord,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Oldenberg, *Buddha*, pp. 11ff.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. M. Fortes and E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *African Political Systems*, p. 258.

<sup>3</sup> Harvey, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

<sup>4</sup> *Cīvaravastu*, pp. 9-10. Khaṇḍa's predecessor, Khaṇḍa, and Simha were appointed generals for life.

<sup>5</sup> *MPS*, pp. 102ff.; *Digha*, ii, pp. 72ff.



and that these institutions of the Licchavis were well-established and "ancient." They were encouraged to revere and support their "elders" (*theras*), and to hold it as a point of duty to hearken to their words. It would also seem from the same text that the Licchavis instructed their successors, the *uparājās* (viceroys), in the art of government and encouraged them to maintain the traditional system of government. They might all have been required to serve an apprenticeship before they were formally anointed at the *Pokkharanī*. Before taking their rightful place in the council, it is possible that they had no voting rights unless they represented their leader or were formally announced as *rājās*.

If the Buddhist sources are significant leads as to the number of the General Assembly, the four chief officers, the adult population and the population of the *gaṇa* at large, the Jaina texts present strong evidence that there was also a smaller body which carried out the public business in the name of the Assembly. The four chief officers, (the *rājā*, the *uparājā*, the *senāpati* and the *bhaṇḍāgārika*), of the *Jātakas* and the oft-quoted formula of the *nava Lecchāi gaṇarāyas* of the Jainas,<sup>1</sup> combine to produce the conclusion that the Licchavian council actually consisted of nine *rājās*. Probably the *rājā* or the chief king was elected by the Assembly and the eight councillors elected by the eight Licchavian clans whose existence is indicated in the Pāli sources.<sup>2</sup>

Although great power is attributed to Ceḍagarāya in the *Niryāvalikā*, he was actually no more than head of the state and was elected by the Assembly to carry out public business with the help of the other eight Licchavian kings. Besides Tomara, the *Bhaddasāla Jātaka* refers to the blind Mahāli whom the Licchavian kings rushed to consult when they heard that Bandhula the Mallian was violating their sacred tank.<sup>3</sup> This suggests that even at that time Mahāli was an important adviser of the Assembly.<sup>4</sup> Before he lost his eyesight he might have been the chief of the Assembly. Ceḍaga, Tomara and Mahāli, appear to have been influential within a short

<sup>1</sup> *Kalpa Sūtra*, p. 65; *Niryāvalikā*, ed. Warren, pp. 26-8; *SBE*, xxii, pt. i, p. 266.

<sup>2</sup> It is not certain from the contexts of the Jaina formula whether the phrase "nine Licchavis, nine Mallakis and 18 *gaṇarājās* of Kāśī and Kosala" was intended to be exclusive or inclusive of Ceḍaga, the Licchavi *rājā*. But the phrase *aṭṭhakulika* in the Pāli suggests the latter; cf. p. 81.

<sup>3</sup> *Jāt.*, iv, p. 149.

<sup>4</sup> *Dhammapada*, p. 219; Mahāli is called *Mahā-Licchavi*.



span of time.<sup>1</sup> Could it be that they were successive chiefs or presidents of the Licchavian *gaṇa*? It seems obvious that the chief of the republic with the eight other *rājās* formed the council of the Licchavis.<sup>2</sup> It is probably this body of nine *rājās* which, according to the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, met fairly frequently and discussed public business.<sup>3</sup> The famous words of the Buddha encouraging frequent and harmonious meetings may not have been intended to apply to the full Assembly. If it was as large as we have suggested, frequent meetings of so large a body might be calculated to interfere with the military, social, and economic life of a community living in such conditions as prevailed in the ancient world.

Buddhaghosa records a tradition about the judicial procedure of the Licchavis. A criminal, after examination by lesser bodies, if not discharged, was made over to the *aṭṭha-kulikas* by the *suttadharas*. And the former, if convinced of his guilt, handed him over to the *senāpati*.<sup>4</sup> We have seen earlier that the term *aṭṭha-kulika* has been given undue importance and has been misunderstood.<sup>5</sup> However, it throws some light on the matter of the Licchavian Council. It may well be that the *aṭṭha-kulikas* are the council of nine referred to in the Jaina sources in its judicial function. Possibly when a prisoner was tried the chief *rājā* did not act as a member of the jury. Thus these eight, the *aṭṭhakulikas* of Buddhaghosa, tried judicial cases.

There was no complete division among the legislative, executive and judicial functions within the Assembly, which is the hall-mark of modern democracies. Neither did the assembly of the early Germans have such division. It "selected" the chiefs and the generals and it tried judicial cases.<sup>6</sup> No doubt the position of the Licchavian Assembly was similar. In practice all these functions would usually be carried out by this council of nine who had to answer for their actions to the Assembly.

Further evidence for the existence of a small inner council within the republic, apart from the Pāli and Prākṛit sources, comes from

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<sup>1</sup> While the *Cīvaravastu* seems to imply that Mahānāma was the chief of the Licchavi *gaṇa*.

<sup>2</sup> Also see *PHAI*, p. 125.

<sup>3</sup> *Digha*, ii, pp. 72ff.

<sup>4</sup> *Sum. Vil.*, ii, p. 519.

<sup>5</sup> See above, pp. 81ff.

<sup>6</sup> For details see Tacitus, *Germania*, chaps. 11, 12, pp. 279-81; Altekar, *State and Government*, p. 127; Rockhill, *op. cit.*, p. 119, etc.; *cp.* Hartland, *op. cit.*, p. 137.



the Sanskrit works. *San̄gha-mukhyas* and *gaṇa-mukhyas* are often mentioned not only by Kauṭilya,<sup>1</sup> but also in the *Śānti Parva*.<sup>2</sup> In the latter source, Bhīṣma, advising Yudhiṣṭhira the Just, says: "They that are the chiefs of the *gaṇa* should be especially honoured. The affairs of the kingdom, O King, depend to a great extent upon them."<sup>3</sup>

It is also clear from the study of the *Arthaśāstra*<sup>4</sup> and the *Śānti Parva* that great importance was placed on the manner in which meetings of the councils were to be conducted. Note how serious is Bhīṣma on this point: "It is not advisable that the republic [*gaṇa*] as a whole should know the [secret] counsels. But the chiefs of a republic [*gaṇamukhyāḥ*], having assembled in secret, should do what is for the good of the republic [*gaṇa-hitam*]."<sup>5</sup>

It is then a fair conclusion that the Licchavian Assembly consisted of the 7,707 *rājās* and that they elected from amongst themselves one to be their president or head of the state for a period of time. He was assisted by a council of eight (excluding the *rājā*), and wielded supreme power in the republic in the name of the Assembly. The latter was too large a body to administer the republic itself. No doubt this small body of nine, which made the plans and policies of the Licchavian republic, had to seek the approval of the Assembly of 7,707 on important matters. This Council would also have prepared the agenda for the Annual General Assembly, the consecration of the *uparājās*, and other important functions and may have made arrangements for filling vacant posts and ranks caused by accident or death.<sup>6</sup> The council of the nine Licchavi *rājās* functioned much like the Athenian *boule* and the Roman magistracy. The powers, functions and procedure of the Licchavian Assembly and its council become clearer if we note what Tacitus said of a similar people in this respect. He says of the Germani that "on small matters the chiefs consult; on larger questions the community; but with this limitation, that even the subjects, the decision of which rests with the people, are first handled by the chiefs. They meet, unless there be some unforeseen and sudden emergency, on

<sup>1</sup> *Arthaśāstra*, p. 377.

<sup>2</sup> *Mbh. Śānti Parva* (Poona edn.), chap. 108, verses 6ff.

<sup>3</sup> *Mbh. Śānti Parva* (Poona edn.), 108, 6.

<sup>4</sup> *Arthaśāstra*, pp. 26-9.

<sup>5</sup> *Mbh. Śānti Parva* (Poona edn.), 108, 24-5.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Cīvaravastu*, pp. 9ff.



the days set apart—when the moon . . . is new or full: they regard this as the most auspicious herald for the transaction of business.”<sup>1</sup>

Under normal conditions the Licchavian council must have smoothly carried out the task of administration without calling emergency meetings of the Assembly. But it is impossible to think of an idle Assembly when their republic was constantly under the clouds of war with their southern neighbour, the Kingdom of Magadha.<sup>2</sup> We would think that during the long struggle between the Vajjians and the Magadhans both the Council and Assembly met frequently, with the Council consulting more often. The continuous state of emergency and war must have increased the importance of the measures of the Licchavian Assembly much as the Roman Senate increased in power and prestige during the period of the Punic Wars and the subsequent campaigns in Greece and the East.

During this exciting period the Assembly would be the supreme authority in all spheres of government, while the Council of nine merely translated the wishes and the commands of the former into action. Although we have said before<sup>3</sup> that the “frequent assemblies” mentioned in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* referred to the meetings of the council, this would be true only during times of peace. When Ajātasattu was bent upon the “utter ruin” of the Vajjian Confederation, the General Assembly of the Licchavis must have held its meetings more frequently than once a year. The council would have also met often during such a perilous period. Perhaps this would be valid for all republics of this period.<sup>4</sup>

The Licchavis’ political organization appears to have been fairly rigid as the Buddhist and the Jaina writers speak chiefly of the Kṣatriyas forming the government in the republic. Vassakāra, the Magadhan minister, was allowed a judgeship at Vesāli.<sup>5</sup> The *Cīvaravastu* informs us of a chief minister of Videha, named Khaṇḍa, who resigned his office because his colleagues became jealous of his abilities. He then chose to settle in Vesāli in preference to other

<sup>1</sup> *Germania*, chap. 11, p. 279. For a more or less similar system, see Tallen-sis in Fortes and Evans-Pritchard, *op. cit.*, pp. 252ff.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Cīvaravastu*, pp. 10ff.

<sup>3</sup> See above, pp. 104-5.

<sup>4</sup> Altekar, *State and Government*, p. 135.

<sup>5</sup> Buddhaghosa, *Sum. Vil.*, ii, pp. 522-4.



monarchical capitals and was soon appointed the *senāpati* of the republican army.<sup>1</sup> The Tibetan tradition tells us of a certain Sakala (Dum-bu), a minister from Videha, who also had to flee because of the jealousy of other ministers. He came to Vesāli and "soon became a prominent citizen in Vaiśālī, and after a while he was elected Nāyaka."<sup>2</sup> These instances indicate that some prominent Brāhmaṇas and probably also Vaiśyas, were allowed full political rights and were appointed to high positions. But these were exceptions for exceptionally brilliant men rather than the rule. If a non-citizen had any complaints or grievances he would have been allowed to approach the Assembly or the Council directly. In the monarchies of later periods we hear of ordinary men approaching kings with their grievances. Nevertheless, it seems quite obvious from our sources that the Licchavis were no exception<sup>3</sup> to the fact that non-Kṣatriyas had no political rights in these republics. In his comment on the "communities living by the title of *rājā*,"<sup>4</sup> Kauṭilya strengthens this view. This practice of the Kṣatriyas alone wielding political power at Vesāli has a Roman counterpart in the sole rule of the Patricians in early Republican times, before the Plebeians achieved similar rights long after the foundation of the Republic in 509 B.C.<sup>5</sup>

There was no need for elections to be held for the General Assembly as the 7,707 were the heads of the Kṣatriya ruling families.<sup>6</sup> Aristotle also mentions such a form of government as having existed at Massalia, Istros, Heraclea and Cnidus. It was called the "aristocracy of heads of houses," and it is probable that the Opuntian Locrians had a similar system.<sup>7</sup> In Altekar's view the 7,707 probably represented the original families of the Kṣatriya settlers who had colonized the Muzaffarpur district. "The leaders of the colonizing families claimed and enjoyed the privilege of royal coronation and royal title".<sup>8</sup> The Council of nine, as we have suggested, was

<sup>1</sup> *Cīvaravastu*, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Rockhill, *op. cit.*, pp. 63ff. The Tibetan tradition appears to have been based on the *Cīvaravastu*.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Altekar, *State and Government*, pp. 114ff.

<sup>4</sup> *Arthaśāstra*, p. 378.

<sup>5</sup> Livy, Bk. ii, 1, 1ff. (pp. 219ff).

<sup>6</sup> *Jāt.*, iv, p. 148; *Vesālīnagare gaṇarājakulānam*; also *cp.* the Greek oligarchies "of fixed number" of 1,000 or 600 (Whibley, *op. cit.*, pp. 134ff.).

<sup>7</sup> Aristotle, *Politics*, viii, 6, 130, 504 and 12; *cf.* Whibley, *op. cit.*, pp. 122ff.

<sup>8</sup> Altekar, *State and Government*, p. 114.



elected. Although the *Vinaya* texts <sup>1</sup> give us a detailed and elaborate account of elections, procedure, etc., in the Buddhist *saṅgha*, this is apparently idealized and was not regularly followed in practice as far as the republics were concerned. Probably the procedure of the Licchavi Assembly was far more simple than the texts would have us believe.

All the meetings were probably called by the sounding of a drum.<sup>2</sup> "When the assembly drum was heard," says Malalasekera, following Buddhaghosa, "all left other duties and assembled immediately in the *Santhāgārasālā*."<sup>3</sup> The Licchavis might have had what is called in the Buddhist text a regulator of seats (*āsana-paññāpaka*)<sup>4</sup> whose duty was to make seating arrangements for the members of the Assembly. Probably he was elected by the Assembly of 7,707 either by drawing lots or by casting votes. The text also speaks of the *salākās*,<sup>5</sup> chips or fragments of wood rather corresponding to the modern voting paper. The technical term for the vote was *chanda*, which meant free choice.<sup>6</sup> There was also a collector of these chips, the *salākā-gāhāpaka*,<sup>7</sup> who was elected to this post because of his recognized honesty and proven impartiality. The five qualifications prescribed for this office—"one who does not walk in partiality, . . . in malice, . . . in folly, . . . in fear and one who knows what votes have been taken and what have not been taken",<sup>8</sup>—indicate that he was an important officer. His consent was sought as to whether or not he would be willing to accept the post. Then his proposer sought the approval of the *saṅgha*. Those who were in favour kept silent, while those against spoke and probably put forward another candidate.<sup>9</sup> A quorum was required and a sort of officer, called the *gaṇa-pūṛaka*,<sup>10</sup> helped to complete the quorum

<sup>1</sup> *Mahāvagga*, secs., ix; *Cūllavagga*, secs., iv, xi, xii.

<sup>2</sup> *Vinaya*, i, p. 56.

<sup>3</sup> *Vinaya*, i, p. 233; *Sum. Vil.*, ii, pp. 517ff; cf. *DPPN*, ii, p. 781; *Dīgha* tr. *Dialogues*, i, p. 113 fn. 2.

<sup>4</sup> *Cūllavagga*, secs. xii, 2, 8; iv, 4ff; cf. *Vinaya*, tr. *SBE*, xx, p. 408 fn; *Vinaya*, ii, p. 305.

<sup>5</sup> *Cūllavagga*, secs. vi, 2, 2.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Rhys Davids and Stede, *Pāli-Eng. Dic.*; Altekar, *State and Government*, p. 132.

<sup>7</sup> *Cūllavagga*, secs. iv, 9ff; cf. *Vinaya*, tr. *SBE*, xx, pp. 25ff.

<sup>8</sup> *Cūllavagga*, sec. vi, 9.

<sup>9</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>10</sup> *Mahāvagga*, iii, 6, 23, 26; *Vinaya*, tr. *SBE*, xiii, pp. 307ff; Bhandarkar, *Car. Lec.*, pp. 180ff; Altekar, *State and Government*, p. 132.



and was responsible for ensuring its presence. The context suggests that this was not a permanent office, but merely a name given to a member of the Assembly who volunteered his services or was appointed by the Council to inform members of the Assembly that some business was to be transacted in the Assembly hall. It may be that at trials a certain quorum was also required before the case could be heard and punishment inflicted by the jury.<sup>1</sup> The *Mahāvagga* further informs us that absentees could also vote.<sup>2</sup> All the issues and differences of opinion were settled by the vote of a majority, *yebhuyyasikā*.<sup>3</sup>

If we are to believe, as seems reasonable, that the constitution of the Buddhist *saṅgha* was modelled on that of the Licchavis,<sup>4</sup> it would appear that the latter had at least three officers—the *āsana-paññāpaka*, the *salākā-gāhāpaka*, and the *gaṇa-pūra*. On the same analogy, the first announced that elections had to take place for the chief *rājā*, or the president. Names were put forward and the *salākās* distributed. The *gaṇa-pūra* counted those attending and determined whether or not the quorum was filled.

Probably nominations of names for the other eight posts of the council were invited separately, one to be elected for each of the eight clans of the Licchavis.<sup>5</sup> It is not unlikely that the election for the council took place amongst the kings of each clan independently of the other clans. The voters in all probability were only those members of the clan who sat at the Assembly of 7,707 and were called *rājās*, and it seems feasible to suggest that the councillors could only be chosen from among their number. It also seems likely that all the elections took place in the *santhāgāra* and that the procedure of election was the same as for the election of the chief *rājā*. These eight councillors formed a jury of eight called the *aṭṭhakulikas*<sup>6</sup> which dispensed justice. After the election of the successful candidates, it is likely that they were honoured with a traditional ceremonial bath and anointment in the *Pokkharanī* and thus solemnly consecrated. This ceremony, as we have seen above,<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, ii, 23; cf. *Vinaya*, tr. SBE, xiii, p. 277fn.

<sup>3</sup> *Cūllavagga*, Khaṇḍ. iv, 9; cf. SBE, xx, pp. 24-6 fns.

<sup>4</sup> *Dīgha*, ii, pp. 76ff; cf. *DPPN*, ii, p. 781.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. above, pp. 81ff.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. below, pp. 116ff.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. above, pp. 104ff.



probably took place during the spring festival. After the formalities each assumed his office and began the task of administration in conjunction with the Assembly.

This republican people had its own territory, and the Licchavian Assembly was the sovereign power of the state. They could exile or kill anybody deserving of such punishment within their jurisdiction, just as the kings of Kosala and Magadha could within their respective kingdoms.<sup>1</sup> It is explicitly mentioned in the *Majjhima Nikāya* that "these *saṅghas* and *gaṇas* like that of the Vajjians and the Mallas had full sovereign rights, like Pasenadi had in Kosala, and Ajātasattu had in Magadha".<sup>2</sup> If the Vajjis and the Mallas had sovereign rights in their territories, the Licchavian republic also had such rights within its domain.

The Licchavis had a strong army which constituted a real threat to the rising power of Magadha.<sup>3</sup> When the army of the Confederation was not engaged in its joint attempt to keep at bay and defeat the Magadhan forces, the Licchavian soldiers probably retired to their farms and cultivated the land or amused themselves at the metropolis. The Roman soldiers acted in a similar manner at the end of a campaign, before the Marian army reforms at the end of the 2nd century B.C. The Licchavis, like the Koliyas, may have had a special body of peons or police apart from this army of the republic.<sup>4</sup> There may have been no restriction as to the Kṣatriyas becoming the peons or policemen, but it would appear that the ruling families did not take part in this lower form of service. In our opinion, however, it was mainly from the artisan classes that this police force was recruited. Besides the Council of nine there were probably other committees which were especially concerned with and dealt with particular departments.

There was no place for women in the Licchavian Assembly as in the Vedic *sabhā* and the *saṃiti*. The Athenian *ecclesia* and the Roman Senate had no women members either. The *Anguttara Nikāya* provides evidence for this in a dialogue between the Buddha and Ānanda, the great champion of the Bhikkhunis. The disciple solicits his master to allow women to join the *saṅgha* and asks, "Why is it, sire, that women do not sit in public assemblies or

<sup>1</sup> *Majjhima*, i, p. 215.

<sup>2</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>3</sup> *Niryāvalikā*, pp. 19ff; *Dīgha*, ii, pp. 72ff.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. below, p. 215.



embark on business?"<sup>1</sup> Apart from this we have no other Buddhist or Jaina text to enlighten us on this point. But we know of no source that contradicts our conclusion that women did not participate in the political assemblies. Thus the Licchavis were more backward in this respect than the militant Spartans and Germans. In Sparta "women enjoyed a position of more equality with men, and greater independence and authority than at Athens. The wife at Sparta was not merely a housekeeper, but an active member of the state, expected to interest herself in the welfare of her country".<sup>2</sup> Likewise, the Germans also "conceived a certain uncanny and prophetic sense in women. They neither scorned to consult them nor slighted their answers".<sup>3</sup> We do hear of some great women in Indian monarchies, but the sources say nothing as to the actual role and position of women in Licchavian politics. However, we can say with some certainty that they had no citizenship rights at Vesāli. They were mainly housewives, after the Indian custom, though Ambapālī might give a different impression. But it is not certain whether or not a wealthy and independent courtesan such as she did influence some assembly members in political matters. Women did play a considerable part in social life, but we have no evidence that they openly did so in politics.

### *Judicial Procedure*

The Licchavian procedure of justice has been a favourite theme of modern historians of the Buddhist republics. A single passage of Buddhaghosa's Commentary,<sup>4</sup> first translated by Turnour,<sup>5</sup> has been used as the sole evidence to reconstruct the judicial procedure practised at Vesāli. Before discussing the views of these scholars, we shall reconstruct the procedure as recorded by the commentator himself.<sup>6</sup> Buddhaghosa says that it was an ancient custom with the Vajjis (*porāṇam vajjidhammam*) that if a thief (*cora*) was caught he was brought to trial before the justices (*vinicchaya-mahāmattānaṃ denti*). If they decided that he was not a thief (*acoro hoti*), they set him free; but if found guilty, he was turned over to the lawyers

<sup>1</sup> *Aṅguttara*, ii, p. 82; tr. ii, p. 92, fn. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Harvey, *op. cit.*, p. 405.

<sup>3</sup> Tacitus, *Germania*, chap. 8, p. 277.

<sup>4</sup> *Sum. Vil*, ii, p. 519.

<sup>5</sup> *JASB*, vii, 2, December, 1838, pp. 993ff.

<sup>6</sup> Buddhaghosa, *Sum. Vil*, ii, p. 519.



(*vohārikānam denti*). If, in turn, they decided that he was not a thief, they let him go; but if they found him guilty they handed him over to the rehearsers of the law maxims (*suttadharās*). When the latter determined that he was not guilty, he was freed; but if proven to the contrary they handed him over to the council of eight clan representatives (*aṭṭhakulikas*). These also had the right either to acquit him or to direct him to the general (*senāpati*). The latter could set the prisoner free if found not guilty, but, if he was convinced of his guilt, he sent the prisoner to the viceroy (*uparājā*). The viceroy, when convinced of his guilt, made him over to the king (*rājā*). If the king decided that the prisoner was truly guilty he consulted the *Book of Precedents* (*pavenī potthakam vācāpeti*) and inflicted punishment according to his guilt.<sup>1</sup>

Turnour only comments in this connection on the phrase *aṭṭhakulika*, translating it as “the eight castes or tribes”. Then he adds, “I can obtain no satisfactory explanation of the nature of the office held by these functionaries. It is inferred to be a judicial institution composed of judges from all the eight castes.”<sup>2</sup> The study of Sanskrit and Pāli was still in its early stages in Turnour’s time and he did not always fully understand the exact connotation of even well-known words. Most modern and standard Pāli, Prākṛit, and Sanskrit lexicons do not warrant the interpretation of *kula* as meaning “caste” or “tribe”. Literally it means “family” and may be used in the sense of a “clan” (*vamśa*). Hence it is most unlikely that the “judicial institution” of the *aṭṭhakulikas* was “composed of judges from all the eight castes.” This term has already been discussed in detail<sup>3</sup> and, to our knowledge, it is not found elsewhere in any Sanskrit, Pāli or Prākṛit text.

Smith,<sup>4</sup> in support of his theory of the Tibetan origins of the Licchavis, relies implicitly on Turnour’s account. Like the later historians, he accepted Turnour’s unreliable indication as an absolute truth. Jayaswal also relies mainly on Turnour and makes no criticism of the eight stages of the trial. While discussing the Licchavian safeguards for the liberty of the citizen, he enthusiastically remarks that the “liberty of the citizen was most jealously guarded. A citizen could not be held guilty unless he was considered

<sup>1</sup> For the complete text of the passage see Appx. D, p. 247.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 993 fn.

<sup>3</sup> See above, pp. 81ff.

<sup>4</sup> *Indian Antiquary*, xxxii, 1903, pp. 233-6.



so by the *Senāpati*, the *Uparājā* and the *Rājā*, separately and without dissent".<sup>1</sup> He then goes on to enumerate the five earlier stages, giving them modern names—e.g., "Court of Justice," "Lawyer-Judges," "Court of Appeal," "High Court," "Doctors of the Law," "Council of Final Appeal," "Court of Eight," and finally comments that "if all the Courts held him guilty, the matter was still subject to the decision of the members of the Executive Cabinet mentioned above".<sup>2</sup> We do not think modern legal institutions can explain the ancient system of the Vesālīans. Moreover, it is inconceivable that such an elaborate system could have ever been put into practice at Vesālī.

Bhandarkar, in his treatment of the problem, refers to the *Atthakathā* and the *Sumaṅgala Vilāsinī*, but mainly relies on Turnour as he quotes only Turnour's article.<sup>3</sup> Commenting on the *Commentaries* Bhandarkar says that "although composed during the 5th century A.D. they contain some interesting historical details and their account of the judicial administration of the Vajjian kingdom is certainly worth considering."<sup>4</sup> Then he gives the eight stages of the procedure of justice. He probably did not consult the original texts, many of which were not published at the time, as he does not give exact references to the Pāli commentaries. Contradicting himself, Bhandarkar also refers to the region as the "Vajjian Kingdom". The detailed procedure outlined by this scholar, is certainly too elaborate and complicated to have ever been followed in practice at such an early date.

Following the tradition of the earlier scholars, Majumdar<sup>5</sup> also relies on Turnour for his reconstruction of the procedure. He optimistically and enthusiastically remarks that "the system is chiefly remarkable for the ultra-democratic spirit which characterises it, and is calculated to give us some insight into the principles of administration followed in these 'non-monarchical' states".<sup>6</sup> Then he outlines the orthodox list of the eight stages of procedure as found in the *Atthakathā*.<sup>7</sup> Majumdar's concluding remark is equally

<sup>1</sup> Jayaswal, *Hindu Polity*, p. 46.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>3</sup> *Car. Lects.*, pp. 154-5.

<sup>4</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>5</sup> *Corporate Life*, pp. 232-33.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 232.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 233; gives references only to Turnour (fn. 1).



worth quoting for the historical imagination it displays. He states that "the right of the individual was thus safeguarded in a manner that has had probably few parallels in the world. He could be punished only if seven successive tribunals had *unanimously* found him guilty, and he was quite safe if but one of them found him innocent. And it is but fitting that the right of the people should thus be safeguarded in a state where the people governed themselves".<sup>1</sup> It is surprising to find such a recognized scholar putting forth such statements. Buddhaghosa, our only authority, who wrote over 1,000 years later of the Licchavian procedure, cannot be trusted in all the relevant details. There is no basis, as we shall presently show, for holding that the Licchavis definitely followed this procedure.<sup>2</sup>

In contrast to these scholars, Rhys Davids is much more cautious in his interpretation of the data and he briefly summarises the eight stages of the procedure, wisely remarking, "We hear of no such intermediate officials in the smaller clans; and even among the Vajjians it is not likely that so complicated a procedure was actually followed."<sup>3</sup> This view shows a fair and balanced judgement. Prof. Rhys Davids<sup>4</sup> has also shown that a book of legal precedents is referred to in the *Tundila Jātaka*<sup>5</sup> and that the tables of law are mentioned at yet another place.<sup>6</sup> He later concludes that "it is therefore not improbable that written notes on the subject were actually in use".<sup>7</sup>

It is not relevant here to give the etymology and meaning<sup>8</sup> of the terms given by Buddhaghosa in connection with the eight stages of procedure. Yet the fact remains clear that, according to the text and also according to Smith, Jayaswal, Bhandarkar, Majumdar, and others, a prisoner was not only supposed to have been tried in such an elaborate manner and in such an "ultra-democratic spirit", but was actually punished only after he had been deemed guilty "unanimously". We have seen that apart from the

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 233.

<sup>2</sup> Law (*TAI*, p. 326); also relies on Turnour but adds nothing new to the subject.

<sup>3</sup> *Buddhist India*, p. 22; and references on that page.

<sup>4</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>5</sup> *Jāt.*, iii, p. 292.

<sup>6</sup> *Jāt.*, v, p. 125.

<sup>7</sup> *Buddhist India*, p. 22.

<sup>8</sup> For meaning see above, pp. 116-17.



*Aṭṭhakathā* two other *Jātakas* also refer to a book of precedents and tables of law. Yet however much our imagination may take flight on this slender evidence, the modern mind cannot possibly be convinced that such a system was practised in Vesāli of the 6th century B.C. It is unthinkable for even the most democratic state of this period to evolve so elaborate and technical a procedure. Moreover, in such circumstances justice would be impossibly protracted and many guilty persons would be acquitted.

We have suggested already that in most cases criminals and questions of property were decided by a "Jury of Eight", members of the Licchavian Council of nine. In order to ensure impartiality and proper justice to the criminal or defendant, the chief *rājā* did not figure on the bench, leaving the remaining eight to decide the case by a simple majority of 5 to 3. In most cases however, unanimity might have been attained. The chief king was probably the highest court of appeal. We have no definite evidence to show the existence of a big court in cases causing great controversy, such as treason or crimes against the republic or its officers. A large court existed at Athens for the trial of such cases, but we cannot say with certainty that a similar one existed at Vesāli, though it is quite probable. "The court which tried Socrates was composed of 501 citizens, and was a subdivision of the largest court of 6,000 citizens, chosen by lot, which dealt with such cases. There was no jury in the modern sense; the decision of the court was that of the majority vote." <sup>1</sup>

Now the question arises — if Buddhaghosa's statement is not accurate, what was his source? We have seen above that many of the problems connected with the names and origin of the peoples<sup>2</sup> who had preferred the Buddha's doctrine to that of Mahāvira, Gosāla or the early Brāhmaṇic practices, had become obscure and the commentator gives its own fantastic interpretations to explain away the difficulties. With regard to his statement about the Vesālian procedure of justice, we can only suggest that Buddhaghosa is recording some early tradition which had arisen as a calculated satire on the Licchavian system of justice, under which many criminals and offenders escaped punishment. The similar passage

<sup>1</sup> *Great Dialogues of Plato*, tr. by W. H. D. Rouse, "The Apology," p. 423. For the full defence of Socrates see pp. 423-46.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. above, *Licchavis*, pp. 85ff; below, *Koliyas*, pp. 207ff; *Videhas*, pp. 136ff.



referring to each member of the assembly as a king, with all the equipment of kingship and an *uparājā*, *senāpati* and *bhaṇḍāgārika*<sup>1</sup> seems also to be of satirical purport. It may be that some humourous and imaginative person started a sarcastic joke against the Licchavian system of justice, which was rather cumbrous and inefficient, and that this spread among the people, passing into the Buddhist tradition after the fall of the Licchavis. By the time of Buddhaghosa it was believed in literally and taken quite seriously. We maintain that there was no factual basis for such an elaborate system, any more than there was for the 7,707 *uparājās*, 7,707 *senāpatīs* and the like number of *bhaṇḍāgārikas*.<sup>2</sup>

There may be other explanations for the Vesālian system of justice, but in our opinion a simpler and less technical procedure would be more in keeping with the actual Licchavian practice. In a comparatively small state at this period it seems unlikely that there were different stages of a trial; more probably all cases were decided by the "jury of eight" with the chief king being the final court of appeal. Nor is it improbable that severe cases were tried by a similar court, perhaps of 500,<sup>3</sup> formed from the Assembly of 7,707 *rājās*. The complexity of the system according to the Pāli commentary may be a reflection of the interference of the ruler and other functionaries in the decisions of the *aṭṭhakulikas*.

### Foreign Relations

It is obvious from the Jaina sources that the Licchavis were on good terms with the Mallas and the tribal peoples of Kāśī and Kosala.<sup>4</sup> These four are always referred to as a group in the Prākṛit texts. As we have already suggested,<sup>5</sup> this shows that the Licchavis actually did form a League together with these and other peoples to face common danger during troubled periods. The *Majjhima Nikāya* also attests to the friendly relations existing between the Kosala king Pasenadi and the Licchavis. The former, talking to the Buddha, speaks of the latter as being his friends.<sup>6</sup> But there

<sup>1</sup> Cf. above, pp. 98ff.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. above, pp. 101ff.

<sup>3</sup> 500 Licchavis went out to greet the Buddha, and it was 500 Licchavian *rājās* who hurried to consult with blind Mahāli when Bandhula was violating their sacred *Pokkharṇī*. This, however, is merely a suggestion.

<sup>4</sup> *Kalpa Sūtra*, sec. 128; *Niryāvalikā*, ed. Gopani and Chokshi, pp. 19ff.

<sup>5</sup> See above, pp. 81ff.

<sup>6</sup> *Aṅgulimāla Sutta*, *Majjhima*, ii, p. 101.



were occasional disputes and quarrels among these republics. Bandhula,<sup>1</sup> the Mallian general of the Kosalan kingdom, consented to fulfil his wife's desire to have a bath in the consecration tank of Vesāli which was forbidden to those who were not Licchavian *rājās*. The Licchavian kings attempted to deter him, despite Mahāli's advice to the contrary. It seems that in the end the general got the better of his Licchavian opponents.

Their relations with Magadha were normally hostile,<sup>2</sup> though it seems probable that in the earlier part of Bimbisāra's reign they were not on bad terms. The Magadhan king is reported by the *Cīvaravastu*,<sup>3</sup> by the Jaina,<sup>4</sup> and Tibetan sources<sup>5</sup> to have had a Vesālian wife. According to the *Cīvaravastu* this marriage involved skirmishes between the two opposing sides.<sup>6</sup> The tension at Kusinārā over the Buddha's relics also points to the tense relations between these peoples.<sup>7</sup> Among ancient and tribal peoples of the world there were fights and feuds over shrines, river water, boundaries or cattle, and the Licchavis and their neighbouring republics were no different. However nothing very serious is mentioned about these disagreements. It was mainly with the rising empire of Magadha that the Licchavis, together with other members of the Vajjian Confederacy, had long pitched battles. Otherwise, with states which held common principles of government and a similar political philosophy, there was less room for grave troubles. The minor disputes over tank and river water could just as well have taken place between families or clans within the same republic.

A study of the foreign relations of the Licchavis reveals that there is no justification here for Kauṭilya's *maṇḍala* theory,<sup>8</sup> that the central state will be hostile to its neighbour and friendly to the state bordering on the latter. This doctrine of a "natural enemy" and "natural friend" is not supported by the Buddhist and the

<sup>1</sup> Bhaddasāla *Jāt.*, iv, pp. 148ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Cīvaravastu*, pp. 73ff.; *Dīgha*, ii, pp. 72ff.

<sup>3</sup> *Cīvaravastu*, pp. 11-13.

<sup>4</sup> *Niryāvalikā*, pp. 19ff.

<sup>5</sup> Rockhill, *op. cit.*, pp. 63-4. Bimbisāra married Vāsavī, Gopāla's niece. Ajātasattu was her child.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Cīvaravastu*, pp. 11ff.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *MPS*, pp. 404ff.

<sup>8</sup> *Arthaśāstra*, chaps. ii, iv, vi and vii; cf. P. V. Kane, *History of the Dharma Śāstra*, iii, pp. 216ff; Ghoshal, *History of Ind. Pol. Ideas*, pp. 130ff; Spellman, *op. cit.*, pp. 156-9.



Jaina texts, at least with regard to the republican and monarchical states of the Buddhist period. It held true only in part, as Magadha was hostile to Vesāli and Kosala to Kapilavatthu. But we do not hear of the Mallas or the Videhas and Nāyas being hostile to the Licchavis and friendly to the Magadhans. Apart from the Mallian Bandhula being the general of the Kosalan army, we do not find the Mallas specifically friendly to the Kosalan king and hostile to the Sakyas, Moriyas and the Licchavis. According to Kauṭilya's theory they should have been natural enemies, but our sources indicate just the contrary. The cordial relations among the republics led them to form a confederation<sup>1</sup> and to unite against Magadha.

### *Political History*

The first positive evidence for the existence of the Licchavis in ancient India comes from unorthodox sources — the Pāli Canon, the *Mahāvastu*, the *Cīvaravastu* and the Jaina scriptures. The earliest important political event for which evidence survives is contained in a tradition preserved in Hsüan Tsang<sup>2</sup> and discussed by H. C. Raychaudhuri.<sup>3</sup> The tradition, whether true or not, records that during the reign of the famous Bimbisāra the Vesālians were audacious enough to invade Magadhan territory across the Ganges. The *Cīvaravastu* not only refers to Bimbisāra's affair with Āmrapālī, but also records his marriage with the daughter of the Licchavian general Siṃha.<sup>4</sup> According to the text, both these events involved fighting between the Licchavis and the Magadhan king. The Tibetan sources, analysed by Rockhill,<sup>5</sup> contain the following episode of Bimbisāra and Āmrapālī which occurs in the *Dulva*.<sup>6</sup>

After Āmrapālī "became a courtesan, Bimbisāra, King of Magadha, heard of her through Gopāla. He visited her at Vaiśālī, though he was at war with the Licchavis, and remained with her seven days". This also points to the fact that hostility existed between the Vesālian Licchavis and the Magadhan king.<sup>7</sup> Whether we

<sup>1</sup> Cf. above, pp. 81ff.

<sup>2</sup> *BRWW*, bk. ix., pp. 166ff.

<sup>3</sup> *PHAI*, pp. 125-6.

<sup>4</sup> *Cīvaravastu*, pp. 10ff.

<sup>5</sup> Rockhill, *op. cit.*, p. 64; *cf.* *Cīvaravastu*, pp. 9ff.

<sup>6</sup> *Dulva*, iii, pp. 87ff, quoted in Rockhill, *op. cit.*, pp. 64-65.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 64-5; *cf.* *Vinaya*, i, p. 268; *Cīvaravastu*, pp. 9ff; *cf.* *DPPN*, i, p. 156.



accept these stories as true or not, it seems most likely from the *Cīvaravastu*'s account and from Ajātasattu's embittered remarks about the Vajjis, as well as from his firm resolve to destroy them,<sup>1</sup> that something really harmful and injurious had been earlier inflicted on the Magadhan king at the hands of the Vajjis, now his avowed enemies.

We know from the Pāli and Prākṛit sources that there was hostility and subsequent war between the Vajjians and Vedehiputto Ajātasattu. Professor Basham has shown that it was a long and chequered affair and that it may have taken ten or eleven years for Ajātasattu to subdue his foes.<sup>2</sup> The Buddhist and the Jaina sources give two different stories to account for the reasons that led to mutual hostility and subsequent war and diplomacy. The *Nirayāvalikā*<sup>3</sup> contains the account of a splendid rutting elephant who was called "Sprinkler" (*Seyanaā*) because he was in the habit of sprinkling bathing ladies of the Magadhan court with water from his trunk. This elephant, together with a priceless necklace that was called *aṭṭhārasavaṅka* because it had curves at 18 points, was given by King Seṇiya (Bimbisāra of the Buddhist texts) to his younger son Vehalla, the governor of Campā.

When prince Kūṇiya (Ajātasattu) came to the throne, he was instigated by his covetous wife Paūmāvaī to demand the treasures from Vehalla. Fearful for his life and belongings Vehalla fled with them to the court of Ceḍaga, his maternal uncle who was head of the Licchavian republic. Ajātasattu sent his messenger repeatedly, but the negotiations failed. War broke out between Magadha and the Licchavis over the two treasures and a great battle took place. The outcome is not clearly stated in the text, but the battle is said to have been fiercely fought. In it a prince Kāla was killed by Ceḍaga and the forces under his command completely destroyed. It would appear from the death and destruction of Kāla and his contingent at the hands of Ceḍaga that all did not go well for the Magadhan invaders.<sup>4</sup> We suggest that in the *Rahamusala* battle the Licchavis were victorious and Ajātasattu suffered great humiliation.

<sup>1</sup> *MPS*, pp. 102ff; *Dīgha*, ii, pp. 72ff.

<sup>2</sup> Basham, *Ājīvikas*, p. 74; see also *PHAI*, pp. 221ff.

<sup>3</sup> Ed. Gopani and Chokshi, pp. 19-29; ed. Warren, pp. 25ff.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Basham, *Ājīvikas*, pp. 68-9.



Further light on the war comes from the *Bhagavatī Sūtra*.<sup>1</sup> Two battles are said to have been fought, called *Mahāsilākantaē* and *Rahamusale* respectively. Kūṇiya is said to have gone out to the *Mahāsilākantaē* battle only after the engagement had commenced and when he had heard that the fortunes of his armies were declining. Ceḍaga, a mighty archer, shot Kūṇiya's ten brothers on ten successive days. His success seemed assured until, on the eleventh day, the god Indra presented Kūṇiya with a great war-engine which struck down the Licchavis with big stones. At the *Rahamusala* battle, Ceḍaga was again defeated in similar circumstances, after Kūṇiya had received a wonderful chariot armed with a great club from Camara, the Indra of the Asuras.

A later Jaina source, Jinadāsa's *Āvaśyaka Cūrṇī*,<sup>2</sup> continues the story. The *gaṇarājās* (heads of the Confederate republics) were demoralized by the two defeats and abandoned Ceḍaga, and returned to their own capitals. Ceḍaga retreated to Vesāli and made preparations for a siege. The city held out for twelve years and was then betrayed by the treachery of the ascetic Kūlavālaya, whose religious merit had formerly protected it. He is reported to have been won over by a beautiful prostitute in the employ of Kūṇiya, persuaded to break his vows and thus to betray the city. Ceḍaga committed suicide by drowning and the surviving Licchavis emigrated to Nepal.<sup>3</sup>

Raychaudhuri<sup>4</sup> has identified the war of the *Nirayāvalikā Sūtra* with that referred to in the Buddhist sources as having taken place soon after the Buddha's death. The account of the preparations for the war is to be found in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*,<sup>5</sup> and that of the war itself in Buddhaghosa's commentary<sup>6</sup> on the *Sutta*. Though much of the story is contained in a comparatively late source, the commentator is said to have been a Magadhan and thus may have had access to records or traditions about the earlier history of the region.<sup>7</sup>

According to the Pāli records, the war flared up not over a

<sup>1</sup> *Bhagavatī Sūtra*, vii, pp. 299ff, 576ff, quoted in Basham, *Ājīvikas*, pp. 69ff, 68-75.

<sup>2</sup> *Āvaśyaka Cūrṇī*, ii, pp. 172ff; cf. Basham, *Ājīvikas*, p. 70.

<sup>3</sup> *Abhidhāna Rājendra*, iii, s.v. *Kūlavālaya*.

<sup>4</sup> *PHAI*, p. 212.

<sup>5</sup> *MPS*, pp. 102ff.; *Dīgha*, ii, pp. 72ff.

<sup>6</sup> *Sum. Vil.*, ii, pp. 516ff.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Basham, *Ājīvikas*, p. 71.

splendid rutting elephant and a priceless neckless, but over an unnamed river port,<sup>1</sup> half of which was in Magadhan territory and half in that of the Licchavis. From the foot of a mountain there descended a very costly and fragrant material.<sup>2</sup> When Ajātasattu went to claim this strange substance he found that the clever Licchavis had preceded him and had taken it away. It was in order to gain possession of the scent-producing mountain that he planned the war against the Vajjians. The *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* clearly indicates that his plans were carefully laid.<sup>3</sup> Ajātasattu first sent his minister Vassakāra to the Buddha and sought his advice on the outcome of an immediate attack.<sup>4</sup> Vassakāra visited the Buddha at Gijjhakūṭa near Rājagaha, just before the latter's journey northwards which terminated with his death at Kusinārā. It is in this context that the Buddha spoke of the seven-fold conditions for the success and prosperity of the Vajjians.<sup>5</sup> The commentator tells us that it was because of the Buddha's advice that Ajātasattu dropped his plans of immediate attack on the Vajjians and bided his time.<sup>6</sup> The *Sutta* further states that as the Buddha proceeded northwards, he met once more with the minister Vassakāra. Together with another minister named Suniḍha, Vassakāra was supervising the erection of a fort at Pāṭaligāma.<sup>7</sup> The Buddha then correctly prophesied the future greatness of the city that would rise on the site.

Buddhaghosa completes the story by stating that the Magadhan king, not confident of his strength to overcome the Vajjians, sent the unscrupulous Vassakāra, in the guise of a refugee, to produce discord among the Vajjian kings. Within a period of three years Vassakāra succeeded in his mission to the extent that no two Vajjian nobles would tread the same footpath together. On the ground prepared by his minister for the invasion, Ajātasattu crossed the Ganges and occupied Vesālī with little opposition.<sup>8</sup>

Apart from two striking parallels, that of the break-up of the

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<sup>1</sup> *Sum. Vil.*, ii, p. 516.

<sup>2</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>3</sup> *Dīgha*, ii, pp. 72ff.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 72-3.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 73-5.

<sup>6</sup> *Sum. Vil.*, ii, p. 522; cf. Basham, *Ājīvikas*, pp. 71ff.; Phillips, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

<sup>7</sup> *Dīgha*, ii, pp. 86ff.

<sup>8</sup> *Sum. Vil.*, ii, pp. 522-4.



Confederation and the betrayal of Vesāli by an agent of Magadha, the two stories have little in common.<sup>1</sup> The similar occurrence of the *gandha-hatthi* of the Jaina and the *gandha-bhaṇḍam* of the Pāli texts perhaps indicates that the author of the *Nirayāvalikā* and Buddha-ghosa both worked on the same tradition.<sup>2</sup> One of the two, however, “probably the latter, had received it in a garbled form. The obscure perfumed material of the Pāli account is less plausible than the tame elephant of the *Nirayāvalikā*, and the latter therefore seems more reliable in this particular.”<sup>3</sup> In our opinion both stories seem to contain some grain of truth. Although there is a contrary Buddhist tradition which makes Ajātasattu the son of a princess of Kosala,<sup>4</sup> we know from the Jaina as well as the Buddhist sources that Bimbisāra had a Videhan princess as one of his queens. She was the mother of Ajātasattu and he is always referred to in the Buddhist sources as the “son of the Videhan princess” (*Vehehiputto*). The fact that both traditions agree on this point suggests that it is more likely to be true than the alternative account of Ajātasattu’s origin.

The Jaina sources reveal that Vehalla’s mother was a Vesālian princess.<sup>5</sup> Vehalla is reported to have been leading a luxurious life at Campā, which inspired the jealousy of Ajātasattu’s wife. This would show that Vehalla had most probably been appointed as the Governor of Aṅga by his father and that he had a fair share of the royal favour. He may well have had in fact an excellent elephant and a valuable necklace. The necklace may not have been coveted by the new king’s wife merely because it was priceless, but also because it had belonged to the late king’s chief queen. Such things were often believed to have magical qualities. For reasons unknown, the king preferred to give the necklace to his younger son Vehalla. If we believe that Ajātasattu was a parricide, who had earlier conspired against Bimbisāra, this would justify Bimbisāra’s choice of his son Vehalla.

This might also have been a hint from the aged king as to his choice of successor. The bold refusal of Vehalla to return the treasures shows that the young prince had enough confidence in his strength, while he shrewdly made his way to Vesāli where he was

<sup>1</sup> Basham, *Ājīvikas*, p. 73; cf. *Proc. of Ind. Hist. Cong.*, 1951, pp. 37-41.

<sup>2</sup> Basham, *Ājīvikas*, p. 72.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>4</sup> *Jāt.*, iii, p. 121.

<sup>5</sup> *Nirayāvalikā*, ed. Gopani and Chokshi, pp. 1ff.



sure to be protected. The story seems to conceal the tradition of a revolt against Ajātasattu on the part of his younger brothers, who were given active support by the Licchavis and used Vesāli as their base. We may well surmise that if the Vajjians had been successful in the war, Vehalla might have been placed on the throne of Magadha. The scented elephant, like the splendid necklace, might have been the symbol of royalty and both such desirable objects might well have been the cause of war. They were not valued intrinsically, but more for their importance as insignia and bringers of power and fortune to the royal house.

We are not certain about the exact nature of the "fragrant-material" mentioned by Buddhaghosa. Kauṭilya does mention some such liquids and ores in his discussion on conducting mining operations and manufactures.<sup>1</sup> This fails to explain exactly what the fragrant material was, but nevertheless makes it highly probable that such a valuable substance existed which either oozed from "the slopes of well-known mountains" or was an ore obtainable from the "plains or slopes of mountains." The possession of such a mountain or plain might well have been a bone of contention between two powers, though there are certainly no hills of appreciable size on the banks of the Ganges adjoining Magadha.

Buddhaghosa's story of Vassakāra being offered a post in the Vajjian administration at Vesāli is not plausible.<sup>2</sup> Though it is by no means impossible that a Brāhmaṇa of his calibre might receive such honour and high position, it seems unlikely in the case of a politician noted for his diplomacy and unscrupulousness. Moreover, we should not forget that the commentator also mentions a group of Vesālians who opposed even Vassakāra's entry into the Vajjian territory across the Ganges.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Arthaśāstra*, p. 82. He speaks of "the liquids which ooze out from pits, caves, slopes or deep excavations of well-known mountains; which have the colour of the fruit of rose-apple (*jambu*), of mango, and of fan palm; which are as yellow as ripe turmeric, sulphurate of arsenic (*hariṭāla*), honeycomb, and vermilion, which are as resplendent as the petals of a lotus, or the feathers of a parrot or a peacock; which are adjacent to any mass of water or shrubs of similar colour; and which are greasy (*cikkana*), transparent (*visāda*), and very heavy are ores of gold (*kāñcanika*)."  
He also mentions those ores "which are obtained from plains or slopes of mountains; which are either yellow or as red as copper or reddish yellow; which are disjoined and marked with blue lines; which have the colour of black beans (*māśa*), green beans (*mudga*), and sesamum; etc.."

<sup>2</sup> *Sum. Vil.*, ii, p. 523.

<sup>3</sup> *Loc. cit.*



The *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* states that the Buddha miraculously crossed the Ganges with his retinue from Pāṭaligāma<sup>1</sup> and then went on to Koṭigāma.<sup>2</sup> “*Koṭi*”, according to the commentator, signified “end.” “At this end, or frontier, *rājā* Mahāpasāda’s palace was situated in that village”.<sup>3</sup> This suggests that Koṭigāma was the frontier post of the Magadhan kingdom.<sup>4</sup> From Koṭigāma or the frontier town, the Buddha and his company of followers went to “Nādikā, and there, at Nādikā, the Exalted One stayed in their Brick Hall”.<sup>5</sup> According to Buddhaghosa “there were two villages of the same name, one belonging to the Cullapitu and the other to Mahāpitu sons, situated on the shore of the same piece of water”.<sup>6</sup> On the same page of the text, the “Nādikās” occur twice in the plural, indicating a clan of that name, and the commentator also supports this interpretation.<sup>7</sup>

If we take the miraculous element out of the text the plain fact emerges that the Buddha, with his monks, reached Koṭigāma by boat. The commentator states that was the last village or the frontier-post of the Magadhan king. But it would appear from the context that this Koṭigāma was situated between Pāṭaligāma and Nādikāgāma. The latter are the “two villages near the river,” or on the bank of the Ganges. Then the Nādikā villages must be placed near or on the north bank of the Ganges opposite Pāṭaligāma and Koṭigāma must be located between the two. The two villages stood on the two banks—the Nādikā villages on the north in Vajjian territory,<sup>8</sup> and Pāṭaligāma on the south bank in Magadhan territory. But it is possible for Koṭigāma to be located between the two villages only if it was situated on an island between the two streams of the Ganges. We have considerable evidence to prove that at this time there was an island about twelve miles long and four miles wide dividing the Ganges into two streams.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Dīgha*, ii, p. 89.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>3</sup> *Sum. Vil.*, ii, p. 542; *Koṭigāmo ti Mahāpanāḍassa koṭiyam kato gāmo*; also see *Jāt.*, ii, pp. 332ff; *Mahāvamsa*, xxxi, pp. 5ff; *Therīgāthā*, i, pp. 287ff.

<sup>4</sup> *Mahāvamsa*, ii, p. 4; *Dīpavamsa*, iii, p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> *Dīgha*, ii, p. 91.

<sup>6</sup> *Sum. Vil.*, ii, p. 543; *Nādikā ti ekam taḷākam nissāya dvinnam Cullapitu-Mahāpitu puttānam dve gāmā*.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 543; *Nādi ke ti ekasmiṃ nāti-gāmake*.

<sup>8</sup> Muzaffarpur District map and *cp.* BDG, iv, p. 15.

<sup>9</sup> Measured on the map of the District of Muzaffarpur, drawn by L.S.S. O'Malley, BDG, the map.



The river Ganges flows for 93 miles on the northern border of the District of Patna. The Sona forms its western boundary for 41 miles, entering this district near Mahābalipur and flowing in a northerly direction to its junction with the Ganges.<sup>1</sup> "A little above the junction it is bridged by the East Indian Railway at Koelwār, from which point the river divides into two streams with a fertile island in the middle."<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the *Muzaffarpur District Gazetteer* not only shows a big island about twelve miles long (from east to west) and about four miles wide,<sup>3</sup> but also locates a police outpost at Raghapur on the island.<sup>4</sup> Another *Muzaffarpur District Gazetteer*<sup>5</sup> shows that besides the Raghapur police outpost there is another village on the island, called Paharpur, and that the area covered by these two settlements has a population of over 1,000 per square mile.<sup>6</sup> The third map of the same gazetteer also locates these two villages on the island.<sup>7</sup> It further informs us, about this Raghapur *Diara*,<sup>8</sup> that "this is a huge island in the Gaṅgā. Its banks are low and sloping towards the south and high and steep towards the north due to the cutting action of the water. The lower portions are covered with deep layers of sand and are either left uncultivated, or where the sand is not very deep, cultivated with various curcurbita. The higher portions having less of sand on the top, are fertile"<sup>9</sup>. Moreover, Raghapur is one of the six *thānās* of Hājipur subdivision.<sup>10</sup>

The evidence provided by these gazetteers strengthens the historicity of the Buddhist commentator's story of a disputed port held in common<sup>11</sup> and existing as a constant source of friction between the two rival powers.<sup>12</sup> This island might well have produced some "fragrant material." At the first opportunity the Vajjis crossed the northern stream, collected whatever valuables there were at the

<sup>1</sup> *Imp. Gaz. of India*, Patna District, pp. 54ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54. The map attached to the beginning of the volume marks the island.

<sup>3</sup> *BDG*, iv; see also our map B.

<sup>4</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>5</sup> *Bihar Dist. Gaz.*, "Muzaffarpur."

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, first map at the back, "Population map of Dist. Muzaffarpur."

<sup>7</sup> See our map B.

<sup>8</sup> '*Diara*'—formation of soil due to deposits of clay by the river. *Bihar Dist. Gaz.*, p. 298.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7; also see pp. 20, 24, 26, 51.

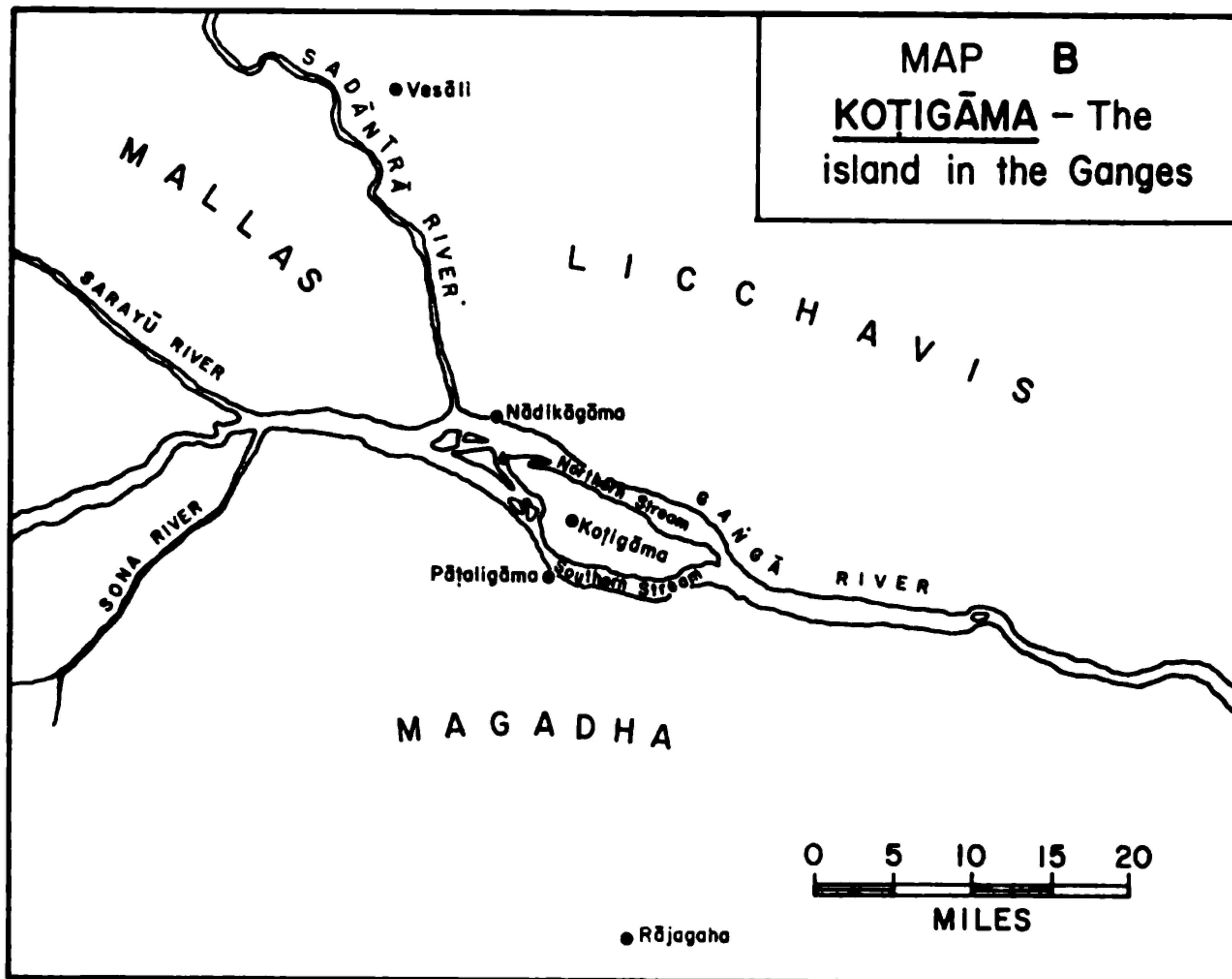
<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 222.

<sup>11</sup> *Sum. Vil.*, ii, p. 542.

<sup>12</sup> Island is marked in all maps of *Imp. Gaz. of India*, as well as in *BDG*; Hindi map by J. B. Tassin; also in *CAGIM*, map xi.



frontier post of Koṭigāma on the island, and made their way back to Vesāli. This infuriated Ajātasattu and he made plans "to root out, destroy, and utterly ruin the Vajjians." Thus, the causes given for the war by the Buddhist commentator are quite plausible in the light of the evidence discussed above.



Apart from the reasons given in the sources we suggest that Ajātasattu might be expected to have been hostile to the Vajjians, as they had occupied what had been the Videhan kingdom. He might have been interested in Videha because his mother was a Videhan princess.<sup>1</sup> All the accounts suggest that he was an ambitious empire-builder and his campaign against the Vajjians was probably carried out chiefly for territorial gain. We are reminded of the conflict of the Samnites, Etruscans and Gauls with the rising power of Rome.

However, both the Jaina and Buddhist accounts show that the Vesālians were at first stronger than the Magadhans. In the Jaina story, Ajātasattu decided to go to war with them only after all his

<sup>1</sup> Cf. above, pp. 89ff. Ajātasattu is reported to have fought for the Kāśī village against Pasenadi. Cf. *Majjhima*, ii, p. 116.

negotiations had failed. According to Jaina tradition, he sent his envoy to them not less than three times.<sup>1</sup> In the Buddhist story the commentator says that Ajātasattu bided his time on the advice of the Buddha.<sup>2</sup> It was only through diplomacy and intrigues that the Vajjians could be overcome, and that too required a period of over a decade.

The *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*<sup>3</sup> pays an eloquent tribute to the merits of the Vajjian political institutions, to their firm resolve to defend their system of government, and to their social customs and economic prosperity. The statement in this text, in the light of other references, suggests that the war of Ajātasattu and the Vajjians was not merely a contest between two rival states for the purpose of expansion and annexation. It also involved a keen "tug-of-war" between two different systems of government, between two sets of principles, in short between two political philosophies. It may be compared to the struggle between King Philip of Macedon and the neighbouring republics of Thebes and Athens.<sup>4</sup> The Indian Philip, assisted by his Brāhmaṇa minister, was determined to "utterly destroy the Vajjians".

In the attempt to discover the origins of this war we may carry our search into the realm of psychology and suggest reasons for the ambivalent monarch's deeper attitude towards the Confederation. It was not merely a political situation brought about by his own frustrating military failures. The seeds of his deep-rooted hatred were probably sown in his heart while he was still a youth. His father, either in the battlefield<sup>5</sup> or in his relations with Ambapālī,<sup>6</sup> had suffered great humiliation at the hands of the Vajjis. This, it may be suggested, stuck in the mind of Ajātasattu and he vowed to avenge what he considered to be also a humiliation to the kingdom. This would partly explain his firm resolve to annihilate the Vajjians. Moreover, there may also have been some jealousy in king Ajātasattu's mind, caused by their belief in different political philosophies.

A liberal and strong republican confederacy like that of the Vajjians, in close proximity, was not only a great obstacle to his

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Nirayāvalikā*, ed. Gopani, pp. 19ff.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. above, p. 126.

<sup>3</sup> *Dīgha*, ii, pp. 72ff.

<sup>4</sup> Harvey, *op. cit.*, p. 322.

<sup>5</sup> See above, pp. 121ff; *Cīvaravastu*, pp. 11ff.

<sup>6</sup> Rockhill, *op. cit.*, pp. 64ff.



ambition of empire-building, but also constituted a real threat to the security of his own state. Assessing all the circumstances, he attempted to undermine his rivals and finally broke upon them with the full power of his arms and vengeful policy. This brings to mind Sparta's resentment of Athens' greater freedom of thought and military strength. The ruthless massacre of the Sakyas by Viḍūḍabha,<sup>1</sup> and the utter ruin of the Vajjis by Ajātasattu has, in our opinion, deep psychological and philosophical factors among its causes, apart from the purely political or diplomatic reasons and material gains.

Ajātasattu was eventually successful in defeating the Vajjians, but it took him several years, and even then he failed to carry out his threats to "root out, destroy, and utterly ruin the Vajjis".<sup>2</sup> That they survived long after Ajātasattu's victory is evident from a statement in the *Kalpa Sūtra* to the effect that the nine kings of the Licchavis instituted a festival in the memory of Mahāvīra's great decease.<sup>3</sup> This implies that they were still influential at the time of his death, and could not have been completely overthrown by Ajātasattu-Kūṇiya.<sup>4</sup> This statement is of course only valid on the assumption that Mahāvīra survived the Buddha and died in 468-7 B.C. This theory is accepted by most scholars, but the strongest Jaina tradition points to 528 as the date of Mahāvīra's death.<sup>5</sup> Professor Basham believes that "we must assume that Ajātasattu did not carry out his threats, but that the chiefs of the Vajjis were merely reduced to subordination, and allowed a degree of local autonomy".<sup>6</sup>

Apart from the literary sources, we have some archaeological evidence to show that the Licchavis survived Ajātasattu's attack for centuries. Altekar reports on the excavations carried out on the site of ancient Vesāli and says that the smaller tank of the Licchavis was "enlarged and surrounded by a wall, represented by its present remains, in about second century B.C. when the Liccha-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. below, pp. 203 on Sakyas.

<sup>2</sup> *Dīgha*, ii, pp. 72-3; cf. Basham, *Ājīvikas*, p. 75.

<sup>3</sup> *Kalpa Sūtra*, i, p. 123; tr. SBE, xxii, p. 266.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Basham, *Ājīvikas*, pp. 74-5.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 75ff.; *CHI*, i, p. 155; *Kalpa Sūtra*, p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> Basham, *Ājīvikas*, p. 75; cf. Y. Mishra's account of the war for which he largely relies on Prof. Basham's paper read at the Jaipur Indian History Congress, 1951. There still are noteworthy differences between his and my interpretations; *op. cit.* pp. 256-63.



vis might have once more become powerful after the downfall of the Maurya Empire".<sup>1</sup> This is also indicated by the finds of "cast coins and terra-cotta figurines stylistically assignable to the Śunga period. The three periods allocated to the development in the ramparts of Vaiśālī attest their existence during the first century B.C.". <sup>2</sup>

A tradition remembered by both Theravāda and Mahāyāna sources shows that Ajātasattu was not able to subdue the Vajjians, even during the last days of the *Thera* Ānanda's life. The latter thought, "If I should die here [in the Bamboo grove], King Ajātaśatru and the Vṛjians being on bad terms with each other, the Licchavis of Vaiśālī would not get a portion of [my] relics. If I should pass away in Vaiśālī, they would not relinquish [a portion to Ajātaśatru]. I will pass away in the middle of the Ganges river." <sup>3</sup> And it is in the middle of the Ganges that Ānanda is recorded to have died.

That the Licchavis survived is also attested to by Pāṇini, who refers to them both as Vṛjis and Licchavis.<sup>4</sup> Kāuṭilya refers to their survival when he mentions them along with other "communities living by the title of *rājās*" (*rājaśabdopajīvīnaḥ*), by both designations (Vṛjis and Licchavis).<sup>5</sup> Kāuṭilya also speaks of the matchless military strength and enviable concord of the republican peoples.<sup>6</sup> But a century or two later, the great Hindu lawgiver, Manu, brands only the Licchavis as *Vrāṭya-Kṣatriyas* and makes no mention of the Vṛjis.<sup>7</sup> It is over a century before the Licchavis next appear, and for the last time, in the Gupta records.<sup>8</sup> The marriage of Candragupta I to the Licchavi princess Kumāradevī is commemorated by the Gupta gold coins <sup>9</sup> and Samudra Gupta's much-loved epithet *Licchavi-dauhitra* found in almost all the earlier

<sup>1</sup> See *Indian Archaeology—A Review*, 1957-8, pp. 10-11; 1958-9, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>3</sup> Rockhill, *op. cit.*, pp. 164-5.

<sup>4</sup> *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, iv, 2, 131; v, 3, 115.

<sup>5</sup> *Arthaśāstra*, p. 376.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 376ff.

<sup>7</sup> Manu, x, 22; Fa-hien also refers only to the Licchavis, and not the Vṛjis (Legge, *Travels of Fa-Hien*, pp. 71-2).

<sup>8</sup> Hüsan Tsang referred to them both but as separate kingdoms; cf. Watters, *On Yuan-Chwang*, ii, p. 81.

<sup>9</sup> D. C. Sircar, *Select Inscriptions*, pp. 253-4; cf. Allan, *Coins of Gupta Dynasties*, pp. 8ff.



Gupta inscriptions.<sup>1</sup> This not only proves their survival but accords to them a place of honour during the golden period of ancient India. The Gupta seals and ornaments found in the remains of Vesāli and the rise of a Licchavi dynasty in Nepal indicate that the chief component of the Vajjian Confederacy retained its individuality for some 900 years after their war with, and defeat by, Ajātasattu.<sup>2</sup>

Significantly, however, the name Vajji (Sanskrit Vṛji) was entirely forgotten.<sup>3</sup> Even the later *Purāṇas* have not registered the name. The Vedic and Purāṇic writers seem to have vied with each other to organize this cloak of silence around a very popular memory amongst the heretics. It is possible that these important people were ignored in the orthodox texts because of their addiction to heresy, and for this very reason gained popularity in the traditions of the Buddhists and Jainas. The disappearance of the name Vajji is also probably due to the fact that the Vajjian Confederacy, as distinct from the Licchavian republic, never recovered after Ajātasattu destroyed it. The Vṛjis are referred to by the *Arthaśāstra* for the last time and later authors apparently did not even know that the Vajjian Confederacy had ever existed.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Fleet, *CII*, iii, pp. 8, 27, 43, 50, 53, etc; cf. pp. 135, 323.

<sup>2</sup> Basham, *Ājīvikas*, p. 75; Altekar, *Indian Archaeology—A Review*, 1957-8, pp. 10-11; 1958-9, p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Though H. Panday says that "the Sajis of modern times inhabiting the same region as our Vajjis may be the descendants of the ancient Vajjis". Cf. *JBORS*, vi, 1920, p. 260.

<sup>4</sup> However, Y. Mishra's account of Vaiśālī terminates soon after their war with Ajātasattu, *op. cit.*, pp. 262-3.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE VIDEHAS

#### *Not the Qualified Champions of Aryan Culture*

The study of the Videhas presents peculiar problems that do not appear among others republics of the Buddhist period. They are included if not directly mentioned, among the *Prācyas* in the ethnological table of the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*.<sup>1</sup> Unlike the Licchavis who are conspicuously absent in the *Brāhmaṇa* literature, the Videhas are mentioned in these sources but do not enjoy the prestige of the Kuru-Pāñcālas. In the *Brāhmaṇas* they are closely associated with the Kāśīs, Kośalas, Magadhans and Aṅgas.<sup>2</sup> All these peoples inhabited the land east of the Ganges-Yamunā confluence to the north and south of the river. This was the home of the oldest Jaina and Buddhist communities lying in or near the tracts into which Agni Vaiśvānara did not cross in the flaming course of his travel over the east.<sup>3</sup>

Manu, probably following the older *Sūtra* texts, defines the land of the *Brahmaṛṣis*, whose customs and rites are taken as a model and whose warriors are the bravest, as Kurukṣetra and the territory of the Matsyas, the Pāñcālas and the Śūrasenas.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the land of the *Brahmaṛṣis* embraces what was set down in the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* as *Madhyamadiś* and the region south of it. But what was regarded in the *Aitareya* as west and east, above all the eastern peoples of Kāśī, Kośala, Videha and Magadha, is in Manu also excluded from the land of the *Brahmaṛṣis*.<sup>5</sup>

Thus we have here a distinction between those stocks who felt themselves to be the "qualified champions of Aryan Culture, and those who were Aryans, it is true, but were not regarded as equally accredited partakers in this culture".<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Ait. Br.*, 8, 14.

<sup>2</sup> *Loc. cit.*; *Gopatha Br.*, 2, 9; *Kauś. Up.*, 4, 1, etc.

<sup>3</sup> *Śat. Br.*, 1, 4, 10ff; Eggeling, *SBE*, xii, p. xli, fn. 4; 104 fn.; cf. *Vedic Index*, ii, p. 298; Oldenberg, *Buddha*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>4</sup> Manu, ii, 19; vii, 193.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Oldenberg, *Buddha*, pp. 393-4.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 394.



*Early History and Status*

Some knowledge of the Videhan background is prerequisite to the study of their republican institutions at the time of the Buddha. They were a monarchy during the Brāhmaṇa period<sup>1</sup> and became a republic just before the birth of Buddhism.<sup>2</sup> The first mention of the Videhas is found in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* which preserves the memory of a time when the sacrificial system, as it flourished on the Sarasvatī, was still a stranger to the land of the Videhas. The same text introduces us to Videgha Māthava, the national hero of the Videhas, who goes eastwards across the Sadānirā and there establishes their rule. "But Agni Vaiśvānara, who comes from the Sarasvatī, does not accompany him; he cannot burn beyond the Sadānirā. Hence, in earlier ages no Brāhmaṇas went across the river to the east, for it was a bad land, whereof Agni Vaiśvānara had not tasted. However, eastward of that river many Brāhmaṇas now dwell; . . . now it is indeed, a desirable place, for the Brāhmaṇas have made it enjoyable through offerings to the gods".<sup>3</sup>

The difference between the ancient Vedic land of culture in the west and the east, where there was Aryan land but not yet a long established home of Vaiśvānara, can scarcely be more significantly expressed.<sup>4</sup> Certainly the boundary between the two tracts here appears to have been already pushed forward a stage farther towards the east. The Kosalas had entered into the community of Vedo-Brāhmaṇic culture earlier than the Videhas.<sup>5</sup> Quite in accordance with this is the fact that among the names of the stocks not held in full esteem, as though being non-Aryans and at the same time applied as the designation of mixed castes, Vaideha occurs as well as Māgadha.<sup>6</sup> In Weber's opinion, the Aryan immigrants themselves were not wholly Brāhmaṇized, i.e., not wholly permeated by the culture of the Kuru-Pāñcālas.<sup>7</sup> The *Kauśītaka Āraṇyaka* states that the residence of the Brāhmaṇas in the Magadhan territory was

<sup>1</sup> *Śat. Br.*, i, 4, 1, 10ff; Eggeling, *SBE*, xii, p. xli, fn. 4; *Vedic Index*, ii, p. 298.

<sup>2</sup> *Anguttara*, i, p. 213, iv, pp. 252, 256, 260; *Vinaya*, ii, p. 146; cf. *DPPN*, ii, pp. 79, 80; *PHAI*, p. 83.

<sup>3</sup> *Śat. Br.*, i, 4, 1, 10ff; cf. Oldenberg, *Buddha*, pp. 398ff.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Weber, *Indische Studien*, ii, pp. 309ff.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Vedic Index*, ii, p. 298.

<sup>6</sup> *Manu*, x, 11; *Gautama*, iv, 17; cf. Oldenberg, *Buddha*, p. 399 fn.

<sup>7</sup> A. Weber, *His. Ind. Lit.*, p. 305.; cf. Oldenberg, *Buddha*, p. 400fn.



considered something unusual and that such Brāhmaṇas were not respectable.<sup>1</sup>

The entire Brāhmaṇic literature emphasizes and attributes sacredness to the Kuru-Pāñcāla region. Although Janaka and his Purohita Yājñavalkya provided intellectual and spiritual leadership for all the paṇḍits of northern India at the time, the *Brāhmaṇas* are intent on stressing the debt of Yājñavalkya to his *guru* Ilaka Āruṇi of Kuru-Pāñcāla. In this connection Oldenberg makes a valid comparison of the Indian situation with that of the Greeks. He states that considering the wide spread of the Aryan territory and Aryan peoples in India, it is probable that even in the Vedic age a community of culture no longer prevailed throughout this vast tract. Analogies with kindred nations (Aetolians and Ionians; Umbrians, Latins and Oscans) show this development of separate cultures. Similarly there is a difference between the western stocks of India with their Vedic culture and the eastern peoples who developed themselves more slowly; between the Kuru-Pāñcālas on the one side and the peoples of Kosala, Videha and Magadha on the other. This distinction must be recognized, according to Oldenberg, although the contrast is not so sharp as between the different Greek stocks.<sup>2</sup>

These remarks bring home the point that it was not only because of the Buddha and his doctrine that the easterners were so different from the westerners. Even during the Brāhmaṇa period the Videhas and others had shown a new development which is obvious from a review of the data. The story of Videgha Māthava shows that Videhan culture came from the Brāhmaṇas of the west and that the territory was Aryanized after Kosala. The Videhas, however, later derived some fame and reputation because of the culture of their king, Janaka, who figures in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*.<sup>3</sup> Here he is presented as one of the leading patrons of the new doctrine of *Brahman*. In the *Kauśītaka Upaniṣad* the Videhas are referred to with the Kāśīs as a joint people.<sup>4</sup> In the list of peoples in the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, as we have seen, the Videhas are passed over, pro-

<sup>1</sup> *Kauś. Ār.*, 7, 14.

<sup>2</sup> Oldenberg, *Buddha*, p. 392.

<sup>3</sup> *Bṛ. Up.*, iii, 8, 2; iv, 2, 6; 9, 30; cf. *Śat. Br.*, xi, 3, 1, 2, 6; *Tait. Br.*, iii, 10, 9, 9, etc.

<sup>4</sup> *Kauś. Up.*, iv, 1.



bably because they were included with Kośala and Kāśī in the term *prācyas*, or “easterners”.<sup>1</sup>

The *Yājñavalkya Smṛti* is careful to point out that the path of *Dharma* was revealed by Yājñavalkya, the sage of Mithilā, in that country where the black antelope roams.<sup>2</sup> This has been explained by the fact that Mithilā (Videha) was not included among the four ancient holy lands of Bhāratavarṣa, it nonetheless acquired sanctity because it was approved of as a pure land by the earlier Dharmaśāstra literature.<sup>3</sup> Again, in the *Śāṅkhāyana Śrauta Sūtra* it is recorded that the Kāśī, Kosala and Videha kingdoms had each the same Purohita, Jala Jātūkarnya.<sup>4</sup> In another passage of the same text, the relation between the Kosalan king Hiraṇyanābha and the Videhan king Para Ātṇāra is referred to,<sup>5</sup> while the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* speaks of Para Ātṇāra as a Kosalan King and descendant of Hiraṇyanābha.<sup>6</sup> All these references make it highly probable that close relations existed between Videhas, Kāśīs and Kosalans at an early period.

The *Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa* refers to yet another king of Videha, Namī Sāpya.<sup>7</sup> In the *Taittirīya Samhitā* of the *Yajur Veda*<sup>8</sup> and the *Kāṭhaka Samhitā*,<sup>9</sup> “cows of Videha” seem to be alluded to.<sup>10</sup> The Videhas also appear in the *Baudhāyana Śrauta Sūtra* in the *Brāhmaṇa*-like passages of that text.<sup>11</sup>

The Buddhist texts reveal something about the early history of the Videhas as well. According to the *Mahāgovinda Sutta*, it was king Reṇu who, with the help of Mahāgovinda Jotipāla, founded the Videhan kingdom.<sup>12</sup> The commentator Buddhaghosa also informs us that Videha was colonized by settlers who were

<sup>1</sup> *Ait. Br.*, 8, 14.

<sup>2</sup> *Yājñavalkya Smṛti*, i, 2.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Kane, *op. cit.*, ii, pt. i, p. 14; J. K. Mishra, *A History of Maithilī Literature*, i, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> *Śāṅkh. Śt. Sūtra*, xvi, 29, 5.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, xvi, 9, 11-3.

<sup>6</sup> *Śat. Br.*, xiii, 5, 4, 4.

<sup>7</sup> *Pañcav. Br.*, xxv, 10, 17.

<sup>8</sup> *Tait. Sam.*, ii, 1, 4, 5.

<sup>9</sup> *Kāṭh. Sam.*, xiv, 5.

<sup>10</sup> Though the commentator merely takes the adjective *vaidehī* as “having a splendid body” (*viśiṣṭhadeha sambandhinī*), the point of a place name in the expression is not very obvious (*Vedic Index*, ii, p. 298).

<sup>11</sup> *Baud. Śt. Sūtra*, ii, 5; xxi, 13; cf. *Vedic Index*, ii, p. 298.

<sup>12</sup> *Dīgha*, ii, pp. 230ff; cf. *DPPN*, ii, p. 880.

brought from *Pubba-Videha* by king Mandhātā.<sup>1</sup> In this term we must assume that *pubba* implies "former" (*prācīna*) rather than "eastern." This is an unmistakable preservation of the Brāhmaṇic tradition, but the foundation of the kingdom is accredited to the kings usually idealized in the Buddhist texts. The commentator, if we can trust his statement, presupposes an older Videha. The sources are not at variance with regard to the fact that the Videhas were not the indigenous people of Videha. The Buddhist tradition in no way contradicts the *Brāhmaṇa*, that they came from the west, *Madhyadeśa*, and were of the same stock as the Kurus and Pāñcālas. Like the Kosalas, Kāsis, Magadhans, Aṅgas and Licchavis, etc., they had moved eastwards beyond what was then considered the "home of genuine Brāhmanism."<sup>2</sup> In this connection one should also take into account the influence of earlier non-Aryan inhabitants of the region on the customs of the Aryans, with whom they no doubt intermarried.<sup>3</sup>

### *Name and Etymology*

Like the word Licchavi, the words Videha and Mithilā inspired a few etymological interpretations by earlier commentators and writers. Modern writers have either reproduced them and accepted them without comment or criticism or have not touched on the point at all. The word Videha, which is applied to the country, has an obvious connection with Videgha Māthava of the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*.<sup>4</sup> The authors of the *Vedic Index* comment that, "Videgha is the name of a man, Māthava, in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*. It is legitimate to assume that it is a name given to him as king of the Videghas or the later Videhas".<sup>5</sup> From this the word will apply to the people of Videha or the Videhans<sup>6</sup> and to their king. There are quite a few examples of kings being called Videha or Videha.<sup>7</sup> However, in the *Māta-Posaka Jātaka* "Vedeha" is also given as the personal name of the king of Kāsi.<sup>8</sup> But in most cases it is the title

<sup>1</sup> *Sum. Vil.*, ii, p. 482; *Pap. Sūd.*, i, p. 184.

<sup>2</sup> Oldenberg, *Buddha*, p. 411.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Basham, *Ajivikas*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>4</sup> *Sat. Br.*, i, 4, 1, 10ff.

<sup>5</sup> *Vedic Index*, ii, p. 298.

<sup>6</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 298-9.

<sup>8</sup> *Jāt.*, iv, p. 94.



of the kings of Mithilā, the capital of Videha,<sup>1</sup> e.g. Suruci,<sup>2</sup> Sādhina,<sup>3</sup> Somanassa,<sup>4</sup> Nimi,<sup>5</sup> and Aṅgati.<sup>6</sup> Thus it seems that Videha was the name of the people who colonized the region east of Sadānirā, with their centre at Mithilā, and their rulers were entitled "Videha" or "Vedeha," meaning king or chief of the Videhas.

As we have noted before, the Videhas occur quite frequently in the Sanskrit and Pāli texts, after their first mention in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*.<sup>7</sup> But there are only three etymologies suggested by the ancient writers and none of them is satisfactory. In the *Taittirīya Saṃhitā* the word occurs in the sense of "cows of Videha" and the commentator takes the adjective *Vaidehī* to mean simply "having a splendid body" (*viśiṣṭa-deha-sambandhinī*)<sup>8</sup>. In this context the word would not refer to a place or rather "the point of a place name in this expression is not very obvious."<sup>9</sup> Buddhaghosa, commenting on the name *Vedehikā*, says that "she was called Vedehikā either because she came from a Videhan family or because she was wise."<sup>10</sup> But Vedeḥa in the sense of wise seems to be very unusual.<sup>11</sup> Buddhaghosa explains Ajātasattu's favourite epithet *Vedehiṇi*, by saying that *Vedehi* here means "a wise woman" and not "the Videhan lady."<sup>12</sup> He is convinced of this because elsewhere it is stated that Ajātasattu's mother was the daughter not of a king of Videha, but of a Kosalan king,<sup>13</sup> and was called Kosalādevī.<sup>14</sup> This interpretation reveals the arduous attempt of the commentator to establish consistency in the Pāli tradition.

Buddhaghosa seems to close his eyes to the fact that this almost inseparable epithet of Ajātasattu occurs in most of the books of the Pāli Canon, and like so many similar cognomens is obviously a metronymic. This is undoubtedly an older tradition and more

<sup>1</sup> *DPPN*, ii, pp. 922-3.

<sup>2</sup> *Jāt.*, iv, p. 319.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 355-6.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, vi, p. 47.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 222.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. above, pp. 137ff.

<sup>8</sup> *Tait. Sam.*, ii, 1, 4, 5.

<sup>9</sup> *Vedic Index*, ii, p. 298.

<sup>10</sup> *Sum. Vil.*, i, p. 318.

<sup>11</sup> See below, p. 142.

<sup>12</sup> *Sum. Vil.*, p. 139; *Pap. Sūd.*, i, p. 120.

<sup>13</sup> *Jāt.*, ii, p. 403; iii, p. 121; iv, p. 342; also see above, pp. 123ff.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, ii, p. 403; cf. *DPPN*, ii, p. 923.

reliable than the later *Jātaka* tradition making his mother a Kosalan princess. It may well be that his father, Bimbisāra, had a Kosalan princess for one of his queens,<sup>1</sup> but we object to the commentator's conclusion that Ajātasattu was born of the Kosalan princess. The older tradition, found both in the early Jaina and Buddhist texts,<sup>2</sup> shows that Ajātasattu's mother was a Videhan lady or a Licchavian princess. Samudra Gupta is always referred to as *Licchavidauhitra* from the fact that his mother was a Licchavi princess. *Gautamīputra* is another similar name taken by Sātakarṇi from his mother's *gotra* name. We assume that the commentator Buddhaghosa himself invented the meaning "wise" to explain away the difficulty, just as he did in deriving the name Licchavi from *Līna-chavī*, "thin skin" or "no skin."<sup>3</sup> Mayrhofer firmly rejects the possibility of the word being derived from *vid*, to know. He states that *deha* in the sense of a wall or rampart, is found not only in Vedic Sanskrit but also in all the cognate languages, Avestan, Persian, etc.<sup>4</sup> Thus, no faith can be put in Buddhaghosa's ingenious interpretation. The word is probably connected with *deha*, meaning a "wall" or "rampart around the city."

The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*<sup>5</sup> gives yet another explanation. Vaśiṣṭha was annoyed with king Nimi who had engaged the former's antagonist, Gautama, to officiate in his sacrifice. The enraged Vaśiṣṭha cursed the king to be *vi-deha*, "bodiless," or "deceased." This is also the etymology of the word given by Macdonell,<sup>6</sup> Monier Williams,<sup>7</sup> and Apte.<sup>8</sup> Modern Sanskritists seem to have relied more on the Purāṇic tradition than is necessary.

These interpretations "having a splendid body," "wise," and "bodiless" are evidently all popular etymologies connected with *deha*, "body" or *vid*, "to know," and can hardly be the correct derivation of the term. The first is an adjective and, as we have seen, does not precisely apply to a place name.<sup>9</sup> The connection of the

<sup>1</sup> *Jāt.*, ii, pp. 403ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Cp. Cīvaravastu*, p. 13; *cf.* above, pp. 140ff.

<sup>3</sup> *Cf.* above, pp. 85ff.

<sup>4</sup> *Cf.* Mayrhofer *Ety. Skt. Dic.*, s.v. *deha*.

<sup>5</sup> *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, iv, 5, 8; see also *Purāṇa Index*, iii, p. 229; Law, *KCBI*, p. 142.

<sup>6</sup> *Skt.-Eng. Dic.*, s.v. *videha*.

<sup>7</sup> *Skt.-Eng. Dic.*, s.v. *videha*.

<sup>8</sup> *Skt.-Eng. Dic.*, s.v. *videha*.

<sup>9</sup> Above, p. 139 fn. 10.



word with “wisdom” is also as dubious as with “body.” In fact Videha is probably just a prakritism for Videgha, as we suggest Licchavi is for *Ṛkṣavin*. The connection with knowledge might have arisen as a “popular etymology” after Janaka’s encouragement of Upaniṣadic wisdom, but it is certainly not correct. The *Purāṇa* writer took the word at its face value, a negative compound *vi* (“without”) *deha* (“body”), and in order to justify his ignorance he invented or refurbished the story of Vaśiṣṭha’s cursing Nimi. No trust can be placed in the story of the Purohita’s curse or the king being named in this way. It too stands with Buddhaghosa’s derivation of the word Licchavi.

The word Videha was thus the title of the king and probably also the name of his people. The word may be connected with *deha* which in the *Ṛg Veda* means “primarily a wall or rampart around the city,”<sup>1</sup> and for which we may assume an earlier form *deg̃ha*. Thus our Videhas are connected with walls or ramparts. The prefix *vi* could be taken in the privative sense,<sup>2</sup> meaning a “people without walls or ramparts” or “destroyers of walls and ramparts.” The people whom Videgha Māthava led to the east of the river Sadānirā were certainly the invaders of a foreign land and may well have been reputed for destroying the walls and ramparts of the people whom they attacked. The “destroyer of cities” is a popular epithet of Indra in the *Ṛg Veda*. The prefix *vi* may also be taken to emphasize the fact that they had walls or ramparts around their own cities. This is less likely however. Few such names, if any, begin with the prefix *vi*, though there are common adjectives, *e.g.*, *vibhāga*, *virāma*, *vijaya*, *vinaya*, etc.<sup>3</sup>

There is a late Purāṇic tradition about Mithilā, the capital of the Videhans. The *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*<sup>4</sup> informs us that it was founded by king Nimi’s son, Mithi or Mithila, who was churned from the dead body (*Videha*) of Nimi after he had been cursed by Vaśiṣṭha. The existence of a prince Mithila is attested by other sources also.<sup>5</sup> This story suggests that the city was founded and named after the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Mayrhofer, *Ety. Skt. Dic.*, s.v. *deha*.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Monier Williams, *Skt.-Eng. Dic.*, s.v. *vi*. It occurs in this sense in the *RV*.

<sup>3</sup> In each case *vi* emphasizes the sense. I am indebted to my Sanskrit tutor, Mr. J. E. B. Gray for this interpretation and etymology.

<sup>4</sup> *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, iv, 5, 8ff.; cf. B. C. Law, *KCBI*, p. 142; *SKTAI*, pp. 131ff.

<sup>5</sup> *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, iv, 5, 8ff.; Vālmīkī, *Rāmāyaṇa*, Bāla Kāṇḍa, 71, 4ff; Kālidāsa, *Raghuvamśa*, xi, 32ff.



region had been colonized by the followers of Videgha Māthava. The city was named after one of his descendants, Mithila. The city was also called Janakapura from the fact that king Janaka ruled there.<sup>1</sup> However, Dr. Subhadra Jha suggests another interpretation. "It is not unreasonable to think," he says, "that Mithilā has some connection with Sanskrit Mitha-together".<sup>2</sup> He takes this to include "Vaiśālī, Videha and Aṅga," but this does not explain the name. Mithilā is never used in the sense of a confederation of these peoples.

### *Geographical Location*

It is clear from the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, that the river Sadānirā formed the western boundary of Videha and separated it from Kosala, but there is no absolute certainty about the identification of the river.<sup>3</sup> However, most scholars now believe that it was the Gaṇḍak.<sup>4</sup> The same text<sup>5</sup> gives us other boundaries, the Kauśiki (Kosi) to the east, the Ganges to the south and the Himālayas to the north.<sup>6</sup> This boundary seems only an approximation and it seems to refer to what was the Videhan kingdom before the establishment of the republic. During or just before the lifetime of the Buddha it ceased to be a kingdom and became a part of the Vajjian Confederacy.<sup>7</sup> As we have seen, it was the territory of the republican Licchavis which lay along the northern bank of the Ganges, while the Videhan republic lay further north, along the foothills of the Himālayas or what is now the Nepalese Terāi. The eastern and western boundaries of the Videhan territory were probably the same even during its republican period. But the Kosalan kingdom no longer bordered on its west and the Mallas appear to have occupied the tract along the Sadānirā.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Vālmīkī, *loc. cit.*

<sup>2</sup> Y. Mishra, *IHQ*, xxxv, pt. 2, 1959, p. 161.

<sup>3</sup> *Śat. Br.*, i, 4, 1, 10ff.; *Mbh.*, Bhīṣma Parva, 10, 23-4.

<sup>4</sup> *CAGIM*, p. 718; *Vedic Index*, ii, p. 299; Rhys Davids, *Buddhist India*, pp. 26, 37; Oldenberg, *Buddha*, pp. 398-9; *DPPN*, ii, p. 880; Law, *SKTAI*, p. 131; Pandey, *op. cit.*, p. 135; *CHI*, i, pp. 122, 309, etc.

<sup>5</sup> *Śat. Br.*, i, 4, 1; cf. *CAGIM*, p. 718; *DPPN*, ii, p. 880; Pandey, *op. cit.*, pp. 262ff.

<sup>6</sup> *Bṛhad Viṣṇu Purāṇa* gives the same boundaries and adds that it extended 24 *yojanas* eastwest and 16 *yojanas* north-south. Cf. V. Mishra, *op. cit.* pp. 151ff.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. above, pp. 81ff.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Cunningham's map xi, pp. 444-5 (in *CAGIM*); Basham, *Ājivikas*, map at the end of the book.



Mithilā was the capital of Videha,<sup>1</sup> and it was there that Janaka ruled and Yājñavalkya disputed on the concepts of *Ātman* and *Brahman*. The size of Mithilā is frequently given as seven leagues, or about 50 miles in circumference.<sup>2</sup> Some historians maintain that Mithilā was the name of both the country and the capital,<sup>3</sup> but the evidence for this view is very late. We believe that Mithilā applied only to the capital and Videha to the whole country.<sup>4</sup> The use of the appellation Mithilā for the whole country is attested only in mediaeval times, and it was used along with Tīrabhukti, or Tirhut, until the last century. Grierson made the name Mithilā famous again by naming the vernacular language of the region Maithili.

The older Videha covered almost the same region as did later Tīrabhukti or modern Tirhut,<sup>5</sup> and Mithilā has been identified with Janakpur, a small town within the Nepal border, north of which the Muzaffarpur and Darbhanga districts meet.<sup>6</sup> The Videhan territory comprised the areas today indicated by north Bihar, the Terāi and the south-eastern portion of the kingdom of Nepal inclusive of the lower ranges of hills.<sup>7</sup> According to M.S. Pandey, the joint territory of the Videhas and the Licchavis did not extend over 1,500 to 1,800 miles in circuit.<sup>8</sup> We accept this location of the Videhan territory during its republican career, as proposed by scholars, with the qualification that it must be regarded only as a probable approximation not disproved by conflicting evidence.

### *The Videhas and the Licchavis*

In the treatment of scholars, the Videhans have been overshadowed by the Licchavis.<sup>9</sup> The one major exception is B.C. Law. In his first book he gives a summary account of the Videhas, mainly dealing with the monarchical period.<sup>10</sup> In his next book, Law records

<sup>1</sup> *Dīgha*, ii, p. 235; *Mahāvastu*, iii, pp. 208-9; *Jāt.*, iii, p. 365; iv, p. 315; vi, p. 246; cf. *CHI*, i, p. 173; Rhys Davids, *Buddhist India*, p. 37.

<sup>2</sup> *Dīgha*, ii, p. 235; *Jāt.*, iii, p. 365; iv, p. 315; vi, pp. 246, etc.; cf. Rhys Davids, *Buddhist India*, p. 37; *CHI*, i, pp. 160, 173, etc.

<sup>3</sup> *CAGIM*, p. 718; Pandey, *op. cit.*, pp. 262-3.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Monier Williams, *op. cit.*, s.v. Videha.

<sup>5</sup> *CAGIM* p. 718; Pandey, *op. cit.*, pp. 135ff; Y. Mishra, *op. cit.*, pp. 151ff.

<sup>6</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>7</sup> Y. Mishra, *op. cit.*, p. 151; also *Pāli-Eng. Dic.*, (PTS), pp. 156-7.

<sup>8</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 136; Rao, *op. cit.*, p. 269; also see our map A.

<sup>9</sup> Majumdar, *Corporate Life*, p. 324, only mentions them once. For others see proceeding pages.

<sup>10</sup> *KCBI*, pp. 141-61.



only one important fact about the Videhas, that they were a member of the Vajjian Confederacy.<sup>1</sup> In his final book the legends about the Videhas are reviewed rather uncritically.<sup>2</sup> On the whole, Law's account gives much valuable information about the earlier period of Videhan history, but his account contains little about political institutions, for which evidence is virtually lacking. Moreover, it seems that Law was not very interested in the republican period of this important people.

Undoubtedly the Videhas were a young republic at the time of the Buddha, but they formed an important part of the Vajjian Confederacy and merit better treatment. That they were as important and powerful as the Licchavis<sup>3</sup> is of course doubtful. However, the fact cannot be dismissed that they were one of the most important constituent members of the League and were probably most similar to the Licchavis in their political institutions. A recent work states that in the 6th century B.C., after the League was established, "the fate of both these regions [Videha and Vesālī] was joined together and their history is almost the same".<sup>4</sup> It is difficult to follow this line of argument because in this case too much emphasis has been placed on the Confederacy. The League was probably nothing more than a temporary device,<sup>5</sup> and the Videhans must have retained their freedom at least in internal affairs and especially in their capital of Mithilā. Not only may there have been a constitutional change in Videha, from monarchy to republic, but there may also have been a considerable change because of the arrival of the Licchavis.

Bhandarkar mentions the Videhas only once, as a member of the Vajjian Confederacy.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Majumdar refers to them once,<sup>7</sup> and treats only of the Licchavian institutions in detail, perhaps implying that the same applied to the Videhans. Jayaswal also mentions them occasionally,<sup>8</sup> and interprets Kauṭilya's *Vṛjika* as referring to the Videhas alone.<sup>9</sup> Altekar also mentions them several

<sup>1</sup> *SKTAI*, pp. 131-49.

<sup>2</sup> *TAI*, pp. 235-42.

<sup>3</sup> Rhys Davids, *Buddhist India*, p. 26.; *cp.* below, p. 157.

<sup>4</sup> Pandey, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

<sup>5</sup> Altekar, *State and Government*, pp. 136ff.

<sup>6</sup> *Car. Lects.*, p. 156.

<sup>7</sup> *Corporate Life*, p. 324.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>9</sup> *Hindu Polity*, pp. 34 fn., 40-50, 229.



times and regards them, along with the Sakyas, the Mallas and the Licchavis, as comparatively larger republics than the Bhaggas, the Bulis, the Koliyas and the Moriyas.<sup>1</sup> Then he comments merely that "the confederation of the Licchavis and the Videhas had executive body of 18".<sup>2</sup> We know that the Videhas were a large republic but there is no direct evidence to support the statement that the Licchavis and the Videhas had such a joint executive body. The Jaina sources indicate 18 (or 36) as being the number of the council of the Vajjian confederacy.<sup>3</sup> It seems that Altekar mistakenly applies this figure to the Licchavi-Videha Confederation, as he gives no source to support his claim. Moreover, there is no evidence to show that the Licchavis and the Videhas formed a political alliance apart from their common membership of the Vajjian Confederacy.<sup>4</sup> H. C. Raychaudhuri also makes mention of the Videhas and comments: "As in Rome, so in Videha, the overthrow of the monarchy was followed by the rise of a republic—the Vajjian Confederacy."<sup>5</sup> Here again, the emphasis is on the Confederacy. The fact, of their changing from monarchy to republic however, was pointed out for the first time by Rhys Davids, the earliest champion of the republics which flourished at the time of the Buddha.<sup>6</sup>

It is reported in the Pāli commentary, *Paramattha-Jotikā*, that the Licchavis, who succeeded Janaka's dynasty as the strongest political power in north Bihar, were the offspring of a queen of Kāśī.<sup>7</sup> This passage indicates the great influence the Licchavis exercised on the Videhas during the republican period and, as we have seen earlier, points towards a later belief that the royal family of Kāśī had close relations with the Videhas and the Licchavis of Vesāli.<sup>8</sup>

#### *Government and Organization*

(The Videhas are a well-known example of a state which had a monarchical form of government in the Brāhmaṇa period,<sup>9</sup> but

<sup>1</sup> *State and Government*, pp. 121ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. above, pp. 81ff.

<sup>4</sup> See above, pp. 81ff, for other members of the Confederacy.

<sup>5</sup> *PHAI*, pp. 83-4.

<sup>6</sup> *Buddhist India*, p. 26.

<sup>7</sup> *Par. Jot.*, pp. 158-85; also cf. above, pp. 85ff.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *PHAI*, p. 84.

<sup>9</sup> *Sat. Br.*, i, 4, 1, 10ff; xi, 6, 2, 1, etc.; *Jāt.*, vi, pp. 30ff.



which had become a republic (*saṅgha* or *gaṇa*) at the time of the Buddha.<sup>1</sup> They were then one of the two most important members of the Vajjian Confederacy.<sup>2</sup> Although they are not mentioned as a separate people in the ethnological list of sixteen great regions (*mahājanapadas*) in the *Anguttara Nikāya*,<sup>3</sup> the commentary makes it clear that they were included in the term Vajji,<sup>4</sup> which had a much wider connotation than Licchavi. Most scholars have accepted the fact that the Videhas had a republican form of government during the Buddhist period. There are numerous references to them in the Pāli canon and the Jaina literature, but they are most frequently referred to in the *Jātakas*. They occur here even more frequently than the Buddha's own people, the Sakyas.<sup>5</sup> They also figure in the *Arthasāstra*,<sup>6</sup> though only insofar as the Licchavikas and the Vṛjikas are referred to, the latter including the Videhas<sup>7</sup> and other confederate clans living by the title of *rājā*; they are not explicitly mentioned by name in this text.

It seems unlikely that the Videhas had as elaborate a system of government as did their more important neighbours who subdued them, the Licchavis.<sup>8</sup> It is improbable that they had unlimited authority and independence in their territory. We have suggested that the Videhas were overpowered by the incoming Licchavis who displaced their monarchy after Janaka's dynasty.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, it was noted that the Licchavis probably stayed at Mithilā for a while before settling down at their new metropolis.<sup>10</sup>

The occupation of Mithilā by the republican Licchavis seems to have been the cause of the overthrow of monarchy in Videha and establishment of a republic. The change of constitution at Mithilā cannot be explained if we do not suppose that the Licchavis, before approaching the southern city of Vesāli in Videha, first stayed for a while at Mithilā. We hear of no strife between the

<sup>1</sup> *Majjhima*, i, p. 225; *Par. Jot.*, i, pp. 158ff.; cf. *DPPN*, ii, pp. 879-80; *PHAI*, pp. 83ff.

<sup>2</sup> Rhys Davids, *Buddhist India*, p. 26.

<sup>3</sup> *Anguttara*, i, p. 213; iv, pp. 252, 256, 260; *Mahāvastu*, i, 34.

<sup>4</sup> *Par. Jot.*, i, pp. 158-85.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Jāt.*, *General Index*, pp. 40, 50.

<sup>6</sup> *Arthasāstra*, p. 378.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Pāṇini, iv, 2, 131; Jayaswal, *Hindu Polity*, pp. 49-50.

<sup>8</sup> *Par. Jot.*, i, pp. 158-85; also cf. above, pp. 116ff.

<sup>9</sup> *Majjhima*, i, p. 225; *Par. Jot.*, i, pp. 158-85; cf. *PHAI*, pp. 83-4; See above, p. 147.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. above, pp. 89ff.



Videhan king and the Licchavis. Further, the *Brāhmaṇas* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* tell of Janaka ruling over Mithilā. But in the Buddhist literature we find Videha as a republic and the Vajjian Confederacy, led by the Licchavis, as holding the supreme power in what had been the Videhan kingdom.<sup>1</sup> It is quite likely that the Licchavis seized Videha from some weak king after Janaka without much conflict, and established a republic on the ruins of the old monarchy. Perhaps a prerequisite for establishment of the Licchavian power and republic in Videha was the destruction of hereditary monarchy.

The Licchavis must have realized with political foresight that the Videhan territory could best be administered, at least in the earlier stage of their settlement in northeast India, from the older capital. It was necessary for their undisturbed settlement to first become established at the centre and mould the governmental machinery into their own pattern.

After sometime they may have realized the disadvantages of having their centre in the foothills, when a great kingdom was rising up to the south of the Ganges. Hence, not satisfied with this centre in the mountains, they moved southwards to Vesāli, a town hitherto almost unknown. The sources already noted <sup>2</sup> indicate that the Vesāli region was then occupied by the Vajjis, who betray their original political importance through the fact that the Confederacy was named after them and that the region around Vesāli was known as *Vṛji-janapada*.<sup>3</sup>

It is not improbable that many of the old Videhan aristocracy who had submitted to the Licchavis shifted their residence to the new centre of power at Vesāli.<sup>4</sup> The Licchavis became most influential as the successors to the old Videhan kingdom. It was in all probability the Licchavian Assembly which held sovereign rights in the former Videhan territory. In such a situation we might expect that a separate Videhan territory existed around Mithilā, restricted to a limited area. Mithilā was now the chief town of a province in the Vajjian territory mainly controlled, at least in foreign relations, by the Licchavis. The Videhan princes, upon moving to Vesāli, might have been given seats in the Assembly. We have already

<sup>1</sup> *Cp.* Jones, *op. cit.*, pp. 99-133

<sup>2</sup> *Cf.* above, p. 89.

<sup>3</sup> *Cf.* above, p. 94.

<sup>4</sup> *Cīvaravastu*, pp. 5ff.



noted that such a movement of Videhan politicians was taking place.<sup>1</sup> Mithilā, and the greatly reduced region of Videha, were no longer administered by a hereditary king, but by a Videhan assembly of the Kṣatriyas, who lived at Mithilā and its surrounding region.<sup>2</sup> Probably, this assembly governed in the name of the Licchavian Assembly, which had supreme rights.

It is not unlikely that the Licchavis directed the foreign relations of the Videhan republic, but, except for the incidents of the Buddha's death in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, we have no definite statement in the sources as to these details. When the founder of Buddhism died at Kusinārā, certain tribes, all of which appear to have been sovereign peoples, put forth their claims for a share of the relics. The Videhas do not figure among them, while the Licchavis do. The Nāyas of Kuṇḍapura are also absent from the list. This suggests either that the Videhas and the Nāyas were not interested in the Buddha's doctrine, or that they were not independent of the Licchavis and thus could not put forth a claim on behalf of their republics. The Videhas, being followers of Brāhmaṇic practices,<sup>3</sup> may well have been indifferent to the Buddha. However, the *Cūla-Gopālaka Sutta* informs us that Videha was in the Vajjian territory,<sup>4</sup> and there is no source to our knowledge which contradicts the conclusion that the Videhans were under the control of the Licchavis. Moreover, the *Brahmāyu Sutta*<sup>5</sup> points towards the process of abandonment of Brāhmaṇic practices and acceptance of Buddhist ones at Mithilā. The conversion at Mithilā of the aged Brāhmaṇa leader Brahmāyu and his followers, at the hands of the Buddha himself, suggests that the Buddhist revolution had begun to bear fruits even at Mithilā, a stronghold of Brāhmaṇic doctrine. In our opinion all these references support our conclusion of Videhan dependence on the Licchavis.

As they were members of the Vajjian Confederacy, it seems likely that the Videhans had an assembly, similar to the Licchavis.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Civaravastu*, pp. 5ff; cf. above, p. 107.

<sup>2</sup> *Dīgha*, ii, pp. 72ff; *Arthaśāstra*, p. 378. Both refer to Vajjis (Skt. *Vṛji*) which included the Videhans as one of the confederate republics.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. above, pp. 137ff.

<sup>4</sup> *Majjhima*, i, pp. 225ff.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, ii, pp. 133ff.

<sup>6</sup> *Dīgha*, ii, pp. 72ff; *Jāt.*, vi, pp. 35ff, refer to the divine assembly which might indicate that the Videhas also had an assembly. Cf. above, pp. 81ff.



As we have no details regarding the Videhan *saṅgha*, we shall have to depend upon a comparison with the Licchavian institutions. No definite number is given of the members of the Videhan Assembly as we have for the Licchavis. It is likely that their assembly was smaller and that it had also non-Kṣatriya heads of families in it.<sup>1</sup> The monarchs had given special honour to the Brāhmaṇas, and Brāhmaṇas like the learned Brahmāyū might have influenced the assembly as participants or have been influential as "Brāhmaṇa heads of families".<sup>2</sup> As Mithilā had been a great centre of trade,<sup>3</sup> wealthy merchants should have at least exercised considerable influence on the affairs of the republic if they were not members of the assembly. The *Jātakas*<sup>4</sup> refer to a "crowd of ministers," "Brāhmaṇas," and "wealthy merchants" of Mithilā, which strengthens our suggestion, though these passages ostensibly refer to the days of the earlier monarchy. There must also have been a meeting place such as the *saṅthāgāra* of the Licchavis, the Mallas and other republics.<sup>5</sup>

Videha cannot have been a kingdom for more than 150 to 200 years in the pre-Buddhist period, as it is mentioned for the first time in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (c. 800 B.C.). During this period of approximately 200 years there were probably not more than eight kings, ruling for more or less a quarter century each. The references to Videhan kings in the *Jātakas* run into the thousands. The *Dīgha Nikāya* refers to king Reṇu who founded Mithilā with the help of his steward Mahāgovinda.<sup>6</sup> The *Majjhima Nikāya*<sup>7</sup> and the *Jātakas*<sup>8</sup> refer to Makhādeva and his 84,000 descendants who ruled at the capital of Mithilā. The *Jātakas* also refer to a number of other Videhan kings—Aṅgati,<sup>9</sup> Ariṭṭhajanaka,<sup>10</sup> Nimi,<sup>11</sup> Videha,<sup>12</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Majjhima*, ii, p. 140.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, ii, pp. 133ff.

<sup>3</sup> *Peṭavatthu Commentary*, p. 227; cf. *DPPN*, ii, pp. 879ff.

<sup>4</sup> *Jāt.*, vi, p. 43.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Rhys Davids, *Buddhist India*, p. 20.

<sup>6</sup> *Dīgha*, ii, p. 235.

<sup>7</sup> *Majjhima*, ii, pp. 74ff.

<sup>8</sup> *Jāt.*, i, pp. 137ff; iii, pp. 325ff; vi, pp. 96ff.

<sup>9</sup> *Jāt.*, vi, p. 220.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 330.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, ii, p. 39.

Mahājanaka,<sup>1</sup> Sūdhina,<sup>2</sup> Vedeha,<sup>3</sup> Suruci,<sup>4</sup> etc. The fact that so many Videhan kings are mentioned supports the view that not only were the monarchs themselves called kings, but the members of the assembly governing the republic also called themselves *rājās*. Kauṭilya's communities living by the title of *rājā* also include the Videhas in the Vṛjikas.<sup>5</sup> It is possible that some of these names of Videhan kings included the non-Aryan chiefs of the region before the arrival of Videgha. Moreover, the humorous remark of the *Lalitavistara*<sup>6</sup> about the members of the Licchavian Assembly all being called *rājās* might be equally applicable to the Videhas.

As earlier stated, we are unable to determine the exact number of the people who composed the Videhan Assembly. The mention of 84,000 descendants of king Makhādeva cannot be even taken to indicate the number of qualified citizens in the entire republic, as republican Videha was much smaller in size than the realm of the Licchavis. The total population might have been about 84,000 to 100,000. The *Gandhāra Jātaka* refers to Videha as including 16,000 villages.<sup>7</sup> This is too large a number, for not even 600 villages could be found in north Tirhut today. The figure of 16,000 may be an old scribal error for 6,000 perhaps signifying the number of people who held farmlands in the republic and who were entitled to exercise political rights. These 6,000 may indicate the entire Kṣatriya families at Mithilā and the surrounding region of Videha, from which a number of heads of the families were chosen or automatically became members of the assembly, after the Licchavian fashion.<sup>8</sup> The assembly probably did not meet more often than once a year and it was the council which convened frequently, as referred to in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*.<sup>9</sup>

Altekar has suggested that the council of the Videhas consisted of nine *rājās*, similar to the Licchavian body.<sup>10</sup> There is no direct evidence either to support this or any other number for the Videhan

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, vi, pp. 30ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, iv, p. 355.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, vi, p. 330.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, ii, p. 333.

<sup>5</sup> *Arthaśāstra*, p. 378; *cp.* *Cīvaravastu*, p. 3; *pañcāmātyaśatāni*.

<sup>6</sup> *Lalitavistara*, i, p. 21.

<sup>7</sup> *Jāt.*, iii, p. 365; iv, p. 316.

<sup>8</sup> *Jāt.*, vi, p. 221; iv, p. 316.

<sup>9</sup> *Dīgha*, ii, pp. 72ff; *cf.* above, pp. 111ff.

<sup>10</sup> *State and Government*, p. 132.



council. Yet, considering the size and importance of the Videhans at this period, it does not seem likely that their council was as large as that of the Licchavis. The *Mahānārada-Kassapa Jātaka* lends support to the view that the Videhas had a council of four.<sup>1</sup> But this is a suggestion and may apply to the earlier monarchical era. The only thing that can be said with certainty is that the Videhas, apart from the assembly, had a council which consisted of a few members.

The references to Videha in the *Jātakas* are ambiguous, because it is not clear whether they refer to monarchy or the republic. A *Jātaka*<sup>2</sup> refers to a king of Videha and seven main officers. *Uparājā* Ariṭṭhajanaka was a viceroy during his father Mahājanaka's reign, before he himself became a king. Prince Polajanaka was a viceroy. We further hear of the general (*senāpati*), the treasurer (*bhaṇḍāgārika*), the keeper of the umbrella, the sword-bearer and the family chaplain. They all are reported to have been put to a test by princess Sivalī, who had been entrusted with the right to choose a proper person to be the king of Videha, after Ariṭṭhajanaka died without a son to succeed him. This *Jātaka* has muddled the two traditions—the Brāhmaṇic tradition of Videha having been a kingdom and the Buddhist tradition of its being a republic with a king chosen by the assembly. Out of these seven officers only four appear to be public officers, the *rājā*, *uparājā*, *senāpati* and *bhaṇḍāgārika*, while the others were apparently the personal servants and attendants of the king.

The *Mahājanaka Jātaka*<sup>3</sup> also attests to the fact that the king was chosen by a qualified body of citizens. There may have been requisite qualifications for the candidate who became the *gaṇamukhya*, the chief or president of the republic. He was a Kṣatriya,<sup>4</sup> claiming the backing of his clan and some influential people as his support, along with the necessary qualities of personal leadership, strength, eloquence and popularity.

Though the source, as we have seen, is very ambiguous, it is possible that three councillors and the king composed the council

<sup>1</sup> *Jāt.*, vi, p. 221. King and three *mahāmattas*, Vijaya, Sunāma and Alāta.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, vi, pp. 220ff.

<sup>3</sup> *Jāt.*, vi, pp. 30ff.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, vi, pp. 225ff.

of the Videhans.<sup>1</sup> It is this body which was responsible for the public business of the republic and which recommended measures of importance to the assembly of the Videhan *rājās*. They also received the envoys of other states and decided upon matters of significance in the name of the assembly, which probably had to approve such measures. Most likely, in practice the council held the supreme power of the republic, under the supervision of the Licchavis, but in theory it was the assembly in which the ultimate authority of the internal administration of the *gaṇa* was vested. It was to this larger body that the council was responsible for its conduct in administration. In external affairs the Videhan council would have been superseded by the Licchavian council.<sup>2</sup>

### *Administration of Justice*

The *Mahājanaka Jātaka* informs us that the king, after joining the Buddhist *saṅgha*, handed over the power of the state to his commander (*senāpati*), who was to administer justice with the help of his chief judges.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the *Mahānārada-Kassapa Jātaka*<sup>4</sup> also informs us that the king was assisted in the administration of justice by a council. These references, with the help of the Licchavian analogy and the fact that the Videhans were members of the Vajjian League, all combine to show that the council of the Videhans also tried judicial cases and inflicted punishment according to precedent.<sup>5</sup> However, we lack the information with which to treat the Videhan procedure of justice in detail. There is no reason to believe that they had a system of justice in anyway resembling that ascribed by Buddhaghosa to the Vajjis, which, if it has any factual basis, must apply to the Licchavis rather than to other members of the confederacy.

### *Another Special Feature of the Republic*

An unusual feature of the Videhan republic appears to have been that the most beautiful woman of the *gaṇa* was not allowed to lead a normal married life. A woman such as Piṅgalā, possessed of surpassing beauty, charm, and accomplishments in dance and music,

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, vi, p. 333, refers to 4 councillors of King Videha.

<sup>2</sup> *Cp.* Jones, *op. cit.*, pp. 99ff.

<sup>3</sup> *Jāt.*, vi, p. 45.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 230.

<sup>5</sup> *Cp.* above, pp. 116ff, Licchavian justice.



was chosen to be the courtesan of the republic. The Videhans had a troop of the "most beautiful dancing girls, panegyrists and musical instrument players".<sup>1</sup> According to the *Gandhāra Jātaka*,<sup>2</sup> Videha had not only 16,000 villages with well-filled store-houses, but also 16,000 dancing girls. Thus, it would appear that, whatever the number of villages, each village and town had its dancing girl or courtesan. She should have been the most beautiful woman of the village or town. The sources indicate that they also had what appears to have been a sort of beauty competition for the selection of the most beautiful woman of the whole *gaṇa*. A later source, *Bhaviṣyata Purāṇa*,<sup>3</sup> informs us that Piṅgalā was the courtesan of the Videhans of Mithilā. She is said to have spent her life as a public woman. It is not unlikely that such women had some political influence in the Videhan republic.

### *Foreign Relations*

During the Brāhmaṇa period the Videhas had close relations with Magadha, Kāśī and Kosala, as has already been noticed.<sup>4</sup> But at the time of the Buddha, after the seizure of their kingdom by the Licchavis, they had become members of the Vajjian Confederacy. The very fact of the replacement of their kingdom by a new form of government put them in a special relationship with the Licchavis. This may be the reason that they had a different status in the Confederacy from that of the neighbouring republics of the Mallas of Pāvā and Kusinārā. Their not claiming a part of the relics of the Buddha at Kusinārā, along with the Licchavis of Vesālī, the Mallas of Pāvā and Kusinārā, the Sakyas of Kapilavatthu, etc.,<sup>5</sup> confirms the view that the Videhan republic had no sovereign rights. The others claimed shares of the relics and later built *stūpas* in their capital towns to enshrine them. The Mallas, though constituent members of the Confederation, did not lose their sovereign rights to the Licchavis, as the latter did not conquer the former.

Vesālī afforded political asylum for the victims of other states as Vassakāra, Khaṇḍa and Sakala successfully sought refuge as well

<sup>1</sup> *Jāt.*, vi, p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, iii, p. 365; iv, p. 316.

<sup>3</sup> *Bhaviṣyata Purāṇa*, xi, 8, 22-44; cf. *Purāṇa Index*, ii, p. 325; cf. Ambapālī above, pp. 104ff.

<sup>4</sup> Above, p. 137; cf. *Vedic Index*, ii, pp. 298ff; *DPPN*, ii, pp. 922ff.

<sup>5</sup> *Dīgha*, ii, pp. 164ff.



as public offices there.<sup>1</sup> That Vesāli was also a centre of attraction to its neighbours is clearly manifested in the desire of Bandhula's wife to have a drink and bath in the Licchavian *Pokkharanī*.<sup>2</sup> A later tradition, preserved in the Tibetan *Dulva*, tells us that "Sakala (Dum-bu), a minister of king Virūdhaka of Videha, had been obliged to flee from his country on account of the jealousy of the other ministers. So he went to Vaiśālī together with his two sons, Gopāla (Sa-Skyong) and Siṅha (Seng-ge). Sakala soon became a prominent citizen in Vaiśālī, and after awhile he was elected Nāyaka. His two sons married at Vaiśālī, and Siṅha had a daughter whom they called Vāsavi (Gos-chan). She was later to be the queen consort of Bimbisāra".<sup>3</sup> This tradition wrongly makes Virūdhaka (probably Viḍūḍabha of Kosala) the king of Videha, but the story unmistakably shows that Videhan politicians were moving to Vesāli, settling there, and obtaining high public posts.

As a member of the Vajjian Confederacy, the Videhans also were threatened by the Magadhan king with ruin and annihilation.<sup>4</sup> Hence they were on hostile terms with Magadha and fought against it along with the other Confederates of the Vajjian League. Though Ajātasattu's mother was a Videhan princess, this probably did not deter him from fighting against his mother's kinsmen who had espoused the cause of the confederacy.<sup>5</sup> As the Mallas were also components of the Confederation, the Videhans should have been on good terms with them and our sources do not contradict this. The Buddhist sources relate that their relations with the Licchavis, Nāyas, Mallas, etc. were close, and similarly the Brāhmaṇic literature indicates the close relations of the older Videhan kingdom with Kāśī, Kosala and Magadha.

We have no other evidence to show the details of their relationship even with the members of the League, but one would expect occasional disputes among them, as there were among the Licchavis and the Mallas, the Sakyas and Koliyas. The Jaina evidence does not make it clear whether the Videhans were represented in the Vajjian council, for it mentions only the nine Licchavis and nine Mallas.<sup>6</sup> But it may be pointed out here that the Jaina texts were

<sup>1</sup> Cf. above, pp. 98ff.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. above, p. 121.

<sup>3</sup> Rockhill, *op. cit.*, p. 63; *cp. Civaravastu*, pp. 5ff.

<sup>4</sup> *Dīgha*, ii, pp. 72ff.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. above, pp. 123ff.

<sup>6</sup> *Kalpa Sūtra*, i, p. 123; *Nirayāvalikā*, ed. Gopani and Chokshi, pp. 19ff.



compiled mainly in western India and that the compilers had no accurate knowledge of northeastern Indian geography. They seem to have confused the names of the confederating republics. It appears that the Vajjian Council consisted of 18, yet we are not certain how many members came from each confederate, though it seems probable that the Licchavis contributed nine and the remaining nine came from the other confederates, the Mallas, the Videhas and the Nāyas. Even if the Videhan republic was represented at the Council of the Confederacy, however they did not have complete control over their own affairs but were jealously guarded and supervised from the Licchavian and Vajjian centre of Vesāli.

### *Later Political History*

The Vajjian Confederation was organized after the fall of the royal house of Videha.<sup>1</sup> The political evolution of Videha thus closely resembles the developments in the ancient cities of Greece where the monarchies of the Heroic Age were also succeeded by aristocratic republics.<sup>2</sup> It is clear from the Buddhist and Jaina sources that the Videhans played no significant role in the political activities of the Vajjian Confederacy but were only a second rate power as compared to the Licchavis and the Mallas.

During the early years of Ajātasattu's reign, the Vajjians and the Magadhans seem to have been perpetually at war.<sup>3</sup> The Vajjians included the Videhas.<sup>4</sup> That their fate was the same as that of the Licchavis is obvious from the fact that all recollection of the confederation seems to have disappeared by the time of Kauṭilya.<sup>5</sup> The Videhans were included in the Magadhan empire before the Mauryan period. They are not mentioned separately by Kauṭilya<sup>6</sup> and Pāṇini,<sup>7</sup> but are included in the Vṛjis. They are frequently referred to in the *Jātakas* and we also find them mentioned in the Pāli commentaries.

Following the old Brāhmaṇic tradition, Manu treats them contemptuously. According to the Lawgiver, a Vaiśya male and a

<sup>1</sup> *Par. Jot.*, i, pp. 158ff; cf. *PHAI*, pp. 83-4.

<sup>2</sup> *PHAI*, p. 121.

<sup>3</sup> *Dīgha*, ii, pp. 72ff; *Nirayāvalikā*, pp. 19ff; Basham, *Ajivikas*, pp. 69ff.

<sup>4</sup> See above, Vajjian Confederacy, pp. 81ff.

<sup>5</sup> See above, p. 135.

<sup>6</sup> *Arthaśāstra*, p. 378.

<sup>7</sup> iv, 2, 131.

Brāhmaṇa female produce a *Vaideha*,<sup>1</sup> whom he considers as base-born (*apa-sada*).<sup>2</sup> A secondary use of the word is shown in reference to their profession, "the service of women."<sup>3</sup> According to Manu again, the *Vaidehakas* are the "lowest of mortals" along with the *Sūtas*, *Cāṇḍālas* and *Māgadhas*.<sup>4</sup> The *Mahābhārata*<sup>5</sup> and the *Rāmāyaṇa*<sup>6</sup> refer to Videha and Mithilā, and the heroine of the latter epic is the Vaidehī Sītā. But the epics only record Videha as a kingdom and not as a republic. The tradition on which these stories are based evidently looks back to the pre-republican period.

In the Gupta period the regions around Mithilā and Vesālī were both called jointly *Tirabhukti*,<sup>7</sup> the modern Tirhut. The *Purāṇas* preserve memories of the Videhas; the *Viṣṇu*,<sup>8</sup> the *Bhāgavata*<sup>9</sup> and the *Bhaviṣyat Purāṇas*<sup>10</sup> give legendary accounts of Videha and Mithilā, their foundation and kings, etc.<sup>11</sup> After Grierson's work on Indian languages the older name Mithilā is becoming more and more popular.<sup>12</sup> The increasing importance of Maithilī and the vigorous attitude of the Indians after independence in 1947 has greatly contributed to the revival of old traditions connected with Videha and Mithilā, along with India's past in general. Thus, it would seem that the descendants of Videgha Māthava of the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* continue living in the region under a different name. The strange mixture of the monarchical and republican traditions in the ancient texts, however, still forbids a clear and accurate account of their republican or quasi-republican institutions at the time of the Buddha.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Manu, x, 11.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, x, 13, 17.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, x, 47.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, x, 26; also see x, 31, 33, 36-7, etc.

<sup>5</sup> *Mbh. Sabhā P.*, 27, 12-3; *Śānti P.*, 312, 5-19, etc.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Y. Mishra, *op. cit.*, pp. 151ff.

<sup>7</sup> Fleet, *CII*, iii, pp. 8ff.

<sup>8</sup> *Viṣṇu*, pp. 388ff.

<sup>9</sup> *Bhāg.*, ix, 24, 64.

<sup>10</sup> *Bhav.*, ix 13.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Law, *TAI*, pp. 238ff.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Y. Mishra, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

<sup>13</sup> For a legendary account of Videha, see B.C. Law, *TAI*, pp. 235-42.



## CHAPTER SIX

### THE NĀYAS

If it were not for the birth of Mahāvira amongst the Nāya-Khattiyas we should probably never have heard of this tribe. It is mainly in connection with the last Tīrthaṅkara of the Jainas and the doctrine of severe asceticism which he expounded that we find a few references to the Nāyas and scanty allusions to their political institutions in the sacred books of the Jainas, the Pāli Canon, Commentaries of these texts and some later epigraphic records. No study of their political institutions has yet been undertaken,<sup>1</sup> but the scattered data collected from these sources do present a fairly cohesive whole, though on some points vagueries arise due to the dearth of material.

#### *Name and Etymology*

The name of this clan appears variously in the Prākṛit Jaina texts as *Nāya*,<sup>2</sup> *Nāyae*,<sup>3</sup> *Nāe*,<sup>4</sup> and also *Nāi*.<sup>5</sup> In the Pāli works they figure as *Nāta* or *Nātha*.<sup>6</sup> The Sanskrit commentator Jinaprabhamuni refers to them mainly as *Jñāta*,<sup>7</sup> while Hoernle Sanskritizes *Nāya* as *Jñāṭṛ*.<sup>8</sup> The name appears in northern Buddhist texts as *Jñāti*.<sup>9</sup>

This name occurs then in at least nine different forms. It is noteworthy that most of our sources for this clan are those in the Jaina Prākṛit, the others being mostly corroboratory. In these texts the word *Nāya* is most frequently employed to denote the name of the tribe from which the chief contemporary opponent of the Buddha sprang.

<sup>1</sup> Excepting B.C. Law who treated the subject in general. Cf. *SKTAI*, pp. 114-22; *TAI*, pp. 243-4.

<sup>2</sup> *Kalpa Sūtra*, sec. 18, fn. 3, mss., A, E; secs. 21, 90, 105, 110; *Uvāsagadasāo*, i., secs. 66, 69; *Uttara. Sūtra*, vi, sec. 17; xxxvi, sec. 267.

<sup>3</sup> *Kalpa Sūtra*, secs. 105, 110, fn. 4, mss., B,C.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 110.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, sec. 104 (2x); *Uvāsagadasāo*, i, sec. 8.

<sup>6</sup> *Anguttara*, iii, p. 74; *Majjhima*, i, pp. 92, 371ff; ii, pp. 217ff, 243ff; *Mahāvagga*, chap. vi, p. 31; *Jāt.*, ii, pp. 262ff.; iii, p. 128; v, p. 246.

<sup>7</sup> *Kalpa Sūtra Comm.*, on secs. 104, 110; cf. *Kalpa Sūtra*, pp. 110-11.

<sup>8</sup> *Uvāsagadasāo*, ii, tr., p. 4, fn. 8; p. 42, fn. 119; p. 139, fn. 304.

<sup>9</sup> *Mahāvastu*, i, pp. 253, 257; iii, p. 383.

The sources are in perfect harmony as to the Nāyas being a Kṣatriya clan. They are often referred to as *Nāya-Khattiyas*<sup>1</sup> or *Jñāta-Kṣatriyas*,<sup>2</sup> and very frequently Mahāvira's father, Siddhārtha, is called a *khattiya*. Mahāvira himself is almost invariably called *Nātaputta* or *Nāthaputta* in all the Pāli sources, and often in the Jaina Prākṛit texts. Reviewing all the sources, we prefer to refer to them by their standard designation as the *Nāya-Khattiyas* (Sanskrit *Jñāta-Kṣatriyas*).<sup>3</sup>

The name is probably connected with *Jñāti* which occurs in the *Rg Veda*,<sup>4</sup> the *Atharva Veda*,<sup>5</sup> and later Sanskrit in the sense of "kinsman" or "relation." The writers of the *Vedic Index* comment that in this sense a *Jñāti* is apparently "one who was connected by blood on the father's side, though the passages do not necessarily require the limitation. But the sense follows naturally enough from the patriarchal basis of Vedic society".<sup>6</sup> However, Böhtlinck and Roth prefer to derive the word *Jñāti* from the root *jan* rather than from *jñā* which in their opinion originally implied nearest acquaintance (*bekannter*).<sup>7</sup> We are unable to decide the root from which the name is derived, but the connection of the root *jñā* with *Jñāta* appears more probable than that of *jan*. However, it seems fairly certain that the word *Nāya* (Sanskrit *Jñāta*) originally implied "kinsfolk" and that the term was later taken as a proper name for this tribe.<sup>8</sup>

Mahāvira is almost invariably referred to after the name of his clan.<sup>9</sup> The Sanskrit commentator used the appellation *Jñātaputra*, but he is never mentioned in any source as *Siddhārtha-putra*. He is referred to as the son of *Khattiya-Siddhattha*, but the popular designation of Mahāvira with the earlier writers is after his clan and not his father. This may be due to the fact that the texts preserving his doctrine were at first orally transmitted and only written long after his death, by which time his clan, which had

<sup>1</sup> *Kalpa Sūtra*, secs. 21, 25, 26, 104, 105; *Uvāsagadasāo* i, secs. 66, 69, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Jinaprabhamuni, *Comm. on Kalpa Sūtra*, secs. 104, 110, etc.

<sup>3</sup> For brevity and clarity we will refer to them simply as *Nāyas*.

<sup>4</sup> *RV*, vii, 55, 5; x, 66, 14; 85, 28, etc.

<sup>5</sup> *AV*, xii, 5, 44.

<sup>6</sup> *Vedic Index*, i, p. 291; cf. T. Burrow, *The Sanskrit Language*, p. 168.

<sup>7</sup> Böhtlinck and Roth, *Skt. Wörterb.*, s.v. *jñā*, *jan*.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Monier Williams, *Skt. -Eng. Dic.*, s.v.; *Pāli-English Dic.*, s.v.

<sup>9</sup> *Kalpa Sūtra*, sec. 110; *Ācār. Sūtra*, i, 7, 8, 12; i, 8, 1, 9; *Uttarā. Sūtra*, i, 6, 17; *Sūtra Kṛtā.*, i, 1, 2, 27; i, 2, 3, 22, etc.



probably embraced his faith, was of greater renown than his father. The peculiar coincidence of its Pāli equivalent *Nātaṭṭa* or *Nāthaṭṭa* may be explained by the similar practice of Buddhists who often referred to their own teacher along with his tribal designation—*Sakka-muni* (Sanskrit *Śākya-muni*), the sage of the Sakyas.

### *Geographical Location*

The Jainas, both the Śvetāmbaras and the Digambaras, state that Mahāvira was the son of a king Siddhārtha of Kuṇḍapura or Kuṇḍagāma.<sup>1</sup> They would have us believe that Kuṇḍagāma was a large town. But in fact they have misrepresented the matter by a gross exaggeration, just as the Buddhists did with regard to Kapilavasthu.<sup>2</sup> For Kuṇḍagāma is called, in the *Ācārāṅga Sūtra*<sup>3</sup> and the *Uvāsagadasāo*,<sup>4</sup> “Kuṇḍapura-Sannivesa” (*Kuṇḍapura-Samnevesāo*), a term which the commentator interprets as denoting a halting place of caravans or processions.<sup>5</sup> It must therefore have been a relatively insignificant place of which it is recorded only that it lay in Videha. The texts inform us variously that “Mahāvira was a Nāya, the son of a Nāya-Khattiya; the moon of the clan of the Nāyas; a Videha, the son of Videhadattā, native of Videha (*Videha-jacce*); a prince of Videha (*Videha-kūmāle*), who had lived 30 years in Videha when his parents passed away”.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to Kuṇḍagāma, the city of Vesālī is mentioned as the birthplace of Mahāvira; hence he is sometimes called *Vesālīe*.<sup>7</sup> In Jacobi’s opinion “Vaiśālīka apparently means a native of Vaiśālī, which would be appropriate to Mahāvira when Kuṇḍagrāma was a suburb of Vaiśālī, just as a native of Turnham Green may be called a Londoner.”<sup>8</sup> A Buddhist tradition, quoted by Rockhill, says that “there were three districts in Vaiśālī”.<sup>9</sup> Hoernle thinks that “there may very well have been Vesālī proper, Kuṇḍapura and Vāniyagāma, occupying the South-Eastern, North-Eastern, and Western

<sup>1</sup> *Sūtra Kṛtā*, i, 2, 3, 22; *Kalpa Sūtra*, secs. 115-16; *Uvāsagadasāo*, i, sec. 69.

<sup>2</sup> Jacobi, *Jaina Sūtras* (SBE, xxii), pt. i, p. x; *Uvāsagadasāo*, ii, p. 5 fn.

<sup>3</sup> *Ācār. Sū.*, ii, 15, 4.

<sup>4</sup> *Uvāsagadasāo*, i, sec. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Jacobi, *Jaina Sūtras*, pt. i, p. x; *Uvāsagadasāo*, ii, p. 8 fn. 15.

<sup>6</sup> *Ācār. Sū.*, ii, 15, 17; *Kalpa Sūtra*, sec. 110.

<sup>7</sup> *Sūtra Kṛtā*, i, 2, 3, 22; cf. *Uvāsagadasāo*, ii, p. 4 fn.

<sup>8</sup> *Jaina Sūtras*, pt. i, p. xi.

<sup>9</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 62; cf. *Cīvaravastu*, p. 6.



portions of the area of the total city respectively".<sup>1</sup> Beyond Kuṇḍapura, the text informs us, and further in a north-easterly direction lay the suburb (*sannivesa*) of Kollāga, which appears to have been also chiefly inhabited by Khattiyas of Mahāvira's Nāya clan.<sup>2</sup> Also a part of their settlement at Kollāga, but lying outside it, was the Nāya-owned <sup>3</sup> *Caitya* (*Ceīya*) of Dūīpalāsa.<sup>4</sup>

"It would seem," believes Hoernle, "that the Jaina tradition which represents Kuṇḍapura as a large town, is quite correct, inasmuch as Kuṇḍapura is taken as the equivalent of Vesāli".<sup>5</sup> In the *Kalpa Sūtra*,<sup>6</sup> Kuṇḍapura is described as a city with inner and outer portions (*nagaram sabbhimitara-bāhīriyam*),<sup>7</sup> i.e., "a large city with suburbs." In Hoernle's opinion, this is evidently a description of Vesāli itself.<sup>8</sup> He does not agree with Jacobi in taking Kuṇḍagāma as a mere "halting place of caravans." He further postulates that Vesāli consisted of three parts and that it was inhabited by the Brāhmaṇas, Kṣatriyas and Vaiśyas.<sup>9</sup> Hoernle may be right in taking Kuṇḍagāma (? modern Basukunḍ)<sup>10</sup> to refer to the city of Vesāli as a whole, but only if we put implicit faith in the Jainas' claim to the greatness and prosperity of Kuṇḍagāma. This, however, does not appear to be the case. The theory of three castes inhabiting three separate parts of Vesāli was later repeated by Mrs. Sinclair Stevenson.<sup>11</sup> But there is no positive statement in the texts to this effect. No doubt all these castes were living in Vesāli but there is no reason to believe that each inhabited separate parts of it, except of course that this seems to have been the case in some other ancient Indian cities.<sup>12</sup>

One fact which is striking in this matter is that mention is made of Mahāvira's father as the chief of the Nāya-clan and as a resident in Kollāga. There is apparently a confusion in the sources about

<sup>1</sup> *Uvāsagadasāo*, tr. ii, p. 4 fn.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, i, sec. 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Kalpa Sūtra*, sec. 115; *Ācār. Sū.*, ii, 15, 22.

<sup>4</sup> *Uvāsagadasāo*, i, sec. 3.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, ii, p. 4fn.

<sup>6</sup> *Kalpa Sūtra*, sec. 100.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, ii, p. 5fn.

<sup>8</sup> *Kalpa Sūtra*, ii, p. 5 fn.

<sup>9</sup> *Loc. cit.*; based on *Kalpa Sūtra*, sec. 22; *Ācār. Sū.*, secs. 2, 4, 22; cf. *CHI*, i, p. 157.

<sup>10</sup> *Archaeological Reports*, i, pl. xxi; xvi, pl. 11.

<sup>11</sup> *Heart of Jainism*, pp. 21-22.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *Arthaśāstra*, pp. 55-7.



the centre of Nāya power, being either in Kuṇḍapura or in Vesāli which was probably not very far from it. It is evident from the *Uvāsagadasāo* that Kuṇḍapura lay to the northeast of Vesāli.<sup>1</sup> The traditions of its being a *sannivesa*, or a "halting place of caravans," indicate that it was a relatively insignificant place.<sup>2</sup> The fact that Mahāvira was called a Vesālian<sup>3</sup> has further complicated the problem of its location. We suggest that Kuṇḍapura, the centre of Nāya power, was different from Vesāli and lay somewhere to the northeast of the latter,<sup>4</sup> and that when the sources speak of its greatness and prosperity they do not imply Vesāli but refer, in grossly exaggerated terms, to the birthplace of Mahāvira. When sources speak of the Nāyas as living in Videha they appear to imply the territory of the older Videhas which was later controlled by the Licchavis from their centre at Vesāli. We cannot determine the distance of Kuṇḍapura from Vesāli, but it appears from the context that it was not very far.

It seems likely that Mahāvira's father, who was the chief of the Nāyas, was not only connected to Vesāli by the marriage with a Licchavian princess but was also a member of the Vajjian Council of 18. Thus he might have had a residence in Vesāli as well, and Mahāvira might also have stayed there for sometime. This would give the Jaina writers ground to call him a Vesālian. We do not know how big the Nāya territory actually was, but it seems unlikely that the region occupied by them was very large. We believe that the Nāyas were a small republic occupying a small region around Kuṇḍapura, but we do not know whether or not they had full rights within that territory. The domination of the powerful Licchavis in the Vesāli region would make it improbable if not impossible that the Nāyas should become too conscious of their independence on territory in such close proximity to the political centre of the Licchavis.<sup>5</sup>

### *Government and Organization*

If Kuṇḍapura was scarcely more than a halting place of caravans or a village, it is evident that the sovereign of that place could at

<sup>1</sup> i, sec. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Ācār. Sū.*, ii, 15, 17; *Kalpa Sūtra*, sec. 110.

<sup>3</sup> *Sū. Kṛtā.*, i, 2, 3, 22.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *CHI*, i, p. 157.

<sup>5</sup> See our Map A, for their location.



best have been a petty chieftain.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, though the Jainas fondly imagine Siddhārtha to have been a powerful monarch and depict his royal state in glowing but typical colours, their statements, if stripped of all rhetorical ornaments, bring out the fact that Siddhārtha was but a mere chief of a small clan. We do not believe that the older texts ever designate him as "the king of Kuṇḍapura or Kuṇḍagāma." We have thoroughly examined the text of the *Kalpa Sūtra* where he is usually mentioned merely as *Siddhattha-Khattiya*.<sup>2</sup> He is referred to as *Siddhatthe-rāja* also, but only when the servants of the household address him or when his wife, who is definitely always designated as *Tisalāe-Khattiyāṇīe*, speaks to him. In some cases, even when both Siddhārtha and his wife Trisalā are mentioned together, he is called a *rājā*, but she is still called by the humbler designation of *Khattiyāṇīe*.<sup>3</sup>

This can only lead one to conclude that Mahāvira's father was merely the chief of his clan. His status was probably no higher than that of the much later taluqdārs and zamindārs. He presumably held office for life and was perhaps assisted in his administration by a small council, the exact number of which cannot be determined.

It may be implied in a statement in the *Sūtra Kṛtāṅga* that the Nāyas had, besides their chief, an assembly which the text says "consisted of Nāyas, and sons of Nāyas; warriors and sons of warriors; commanders and sons of commanders; and generals and sons of generals,"<sup>4</sup> much like that of the Licchavis and others. However, unlike that of the Licchavis, the number constituting the Nāya assembly is unspecified. Although commanders and generals existed among the Licchavis because of their large army and also amongst the army of the Vajjian Confederacy (if at all there was such a separate force), it seems fantastic to hear of commanders and generals amongst the small clan of the Nāyas. A small force for police duties may have existed, as such a body is mentioned in the *Kalpa Sūtra*.<sup>5</sup> The Nāyas may have contributed to the Vajjian army at the time of the war between Ajātasattu and the Vajjians, but it is unlikely, in the light of the sources, that they

<sup>1</sup> Jacobi, *Jaina Sātras*, pt. i, p. xi.

<sup>2</sup> Jacobi's text, secs. 21, 26, 28, 30, 47, 59, 65-7, 69, 72, etc.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, secs. 21 (twice), 26, 28 (thrice), 30-3 (twice in 32), 47-8, 50, 66, 68-70, 81-2, etc.

<sup>4</sup> *Sū. Kṛtā.*, ii, 1, 13.

<sup>5</sup> *Kalpa Sūtra*, sec. 102 refers to *abhaḍa*, or policemen.



had commanders, generals and a large standing army. This is yet another example of the gross exaggeration and unreliability of the Jaina sources. Probably the Nāya assembly consisted, like that of their close neighbours the Licchavis, of the heads of the Kṣatriya families.

There is no direct mention of an assembly-hall of the Nāyas in the Jaina Canon, but Jinaprabha the commentator refers to one.<sup>1</sup> We know that other republics possessed them, and comparatively small towns had their own *santhāgāras*.<sup>2</sup> So it is probable that the Nāyas also had one. On Licchavi analogy we may assume the existence of a small council which met more frequently than the general assembly, but the sources do not give further detail regarding the Nāya administration of public business or their manner of dispensing justice. ✓

### *The Vajjis and the Nāyas*

Because of their location near Vesāli, Siddhārtha, then the chief of the Nāyas, was married to Trisalā, the sister of Ceḍaga, chief of the Licchavis.<sup>3</sup> Siddhārtha must have been quite influential through this connection. He was thus also indirectly connected by marriage with the Magadhan king Bimbisāra who had married a daughter of the same Ceḍaga.<sup>4</sup> It would be quite in keeping with the texts if we suggest that the chief of the Nāyas, Siddhārtha in the present case, represented their clan on the Vajjian Council of Eighteen at Vesāli. In the absence of detailed accounts and references to the political influence of the Nāyas, their geographical location near the Vajjian metropolis at Vesāli and their relations with the Licchavis make it most likely that they were a constituent member of the Confederacy. This being the case, one is tempted to conclude that the Nāyas also fought against the Magadhan king in the long war between Magadha and the Vajjians.<sup>5</sup> However, the sources do not give the Nāyas much importance in political matters. No doubt as the Nāyas were very close associates of the Licchavis and also members of the Vajjian League,<sup>6</sup> their more powerful

<sup>1</sup> *Comm. on the Kalpa Sūtra*, sec. 105.

<sup>2</sup> Rhys Davids, *Buddhist India*, p. 19.

<sup>3</sup> *Niryāvalikā*, ed. Gopani and Chokshi, pp. 19ff.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. above, pp. 123ff.

<sup>5</sup> *Niryāvalikā*, pp. 19ff; cf. *CHI*, i, p. 157.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. above, pp. 81ff.



neighbours overshadowed them. The Nāyas may have retained internal authority, but left to the Vajjian Council all matters of war and foreign policy.

This seems probable from the fact that the Nāya-Khattiyas did not claim a share in the relics of the Buddha as did the neighbouring independent republics of the Licchavis, Mallas, Koliyas and Sakyas, along with the Magadhan king.<sup>1</sup> The passages in question seem to indicate the existence of sovereign rights of particular states, which claimed their share on the ground that the Buddha was a Kṣatriya and so were they. Thus why should the Nāyas not have made their claim if they were independent? The fact that the Nāyas of Kuṇḍapura, like the Videhas of Mithilā, made no such claim suggests that they played second fiddle to the more powerful Licchavis. Their status appears similar to that of some of the provinces of Italy which were subject to the Roman Republic.

In our opinion, both the Nāyas and the Videhas were represented in the Vajjian Council, but the Nāyas, though a smaller clan than the Videhas, had the advantage of a geographical situation which was nearer to the Vajjian metropolis. This would tend to justify their presence in the Council of Eighteen. Moreover, it is highly unlikely that Ceḍaga would have married his sister to the chief of a completely insignificant clan. Although small in size his position in the Council would have made Siddhārtha eligible to marry into the family of the head of the Vajjian Confederacy.

### *Political History*

According to the *Ācārāṅga Sūtra*, Mahāvīra's parents were worshippers of Pārśva,<sup>2</sup> and in Hoernle's opinion, "with them probably the whole clan of Nāya-Kshattriyas were followers of the tenets of Pārshwanātha."<sup>3</sup> The *Kalpa Sūtra* also gives an account of Pārśva who is often referred to in the text as *Purisānīya* or the "favourite of the people."<sup>4</sup> The Jaina tradition puts the date of Mahāvīra's predecessor Pārśva, whose cult Mahāvīra reformed, about 250 years before the latter.<sup>5</sup> The Nāyas being the followers of Pārśva and

<sup>1</sup> *MPS*, pp. 432-42; *Dīgha*, ii, pp. 164ff. The Licchavis and the Mallas, keen followers of the Buddha, instituted a Festival of Lights to honour Mahāvīra's death.

<sup>2</sup> *Ācār. Sū.*, ii, 15, 16.

<sup>3</sup> *Uvāsagadasāo*, ii, p. 6 fn. 8.

<sup>4</sup> *Kalpa Sūtra*, secs. 149-69.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Hoernle, in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, i, p. 265.



later of Mahāvīra kept up a religious establishment (*ceīya*) for their accomodation on periodical visits with their disciples to Kuṇḍapura or Vesāli.<sup>1</sup> We may doubt the accuracy of the tradition with regard to Pārśva's early date, but it seems fairly certain that the Nāyas, before Mahāvīra, had been followers of Pārśva<sup>2</sup> and that he was a historical figure. This inevitably shows that despite the absence of any mention of the Nāyas in the Vedic literature, they existed well before the time of Mahāvīra.

The antiquity of the Nāyas can be pushed back even further by a careful study of the *Uvāsagadasāo*. This text gives an account of the religious profession of Jaina lay disciples (*Uvāsagas*). It is set out in ten lectures (*adhyayanās*). At the end of each lecture, save one, it is stated that "he will attain perfection in the Great-Videha Country" (*Mahāvidehe vāse sijjhihiē*).<sup>3</sup> In the *Ācārāṅga Sūtra* the same formula is repeated in connection with Mahāvīra's parents.<sup>4</sup> Yet in the following section Mahāvīra is called a "Videha, son of Videhadattā, a native of Videha, a prince of Videha who lived 30 years amongst the Videhas".<sup>5</sup> The constant emphasis on Mahā-Videha and Videha suggests, to our mind, that in spite of the Licchavi newcomers and their establishment of power at Vesāli, the Jainas still called the whole territory to the north of the Ganges by its much older name, Mahā-Videha. The Nāyas occupied a region in Mahā-Videha, and thought of themselves as Videhas. They probably came from the Madhyadeśa along with the Videhas.<sup>6</sup>

The Nāyas are directly mentioned in the Buddhist Pāli works in connection with the *Nigantha Nātaputta*.<sup>7</sup> The northern traditions in Sanskrit, Tibetan, and Chinese sources also make mention of the *Nirgrantha Jñātaputra*<sup>8</sup> but mainly in connection with the chief opponents of the Buddha at the time. Buddhist sources do not enlighten us further on the political history of the Nāyas. The Jaina Prākṛit texts, as already noted, also mention the Nāyas and occasionally allude to their republican or quasi-republican institutions.

<sup>1</sup> *Uvāsagadasāo*, ii, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> *Uvāsagadasāo*, vi, sec. 179, p. 104.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, i, secs. 90, 125, 144, 154, 162, 230, 266, 274, 277; Appx. p. 40.

<sup>4</sup> *Ācār. Sū.*, ii, 15, 16.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, ii, 15, 17.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. above, pp. 60ff.

<sup>7</sup> *Āṅguttara*, iii, p. 74; *Majjhima*, i, p. 56.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Rockhill. *op. cit.*, pp. 79, 96, 104, 259, etc.

It is a fair inference that the Nāyas were also defeated along with other Vajjian Confederates and later assimilated in the Magadhan population.) We do not hear of them as a political entity after the break-up of the Vajjian Confederation, and the region lying along the north of the Ganges to the foothills of Himālayas must certainly have been finally annexed during the reign of the first Mauryan emperor. No source gives us any further help in writing the political history of the Nāyas. The histories of Jainism and its founder have been written,<sup>1</sup> but in the present state of our knowledge we are unable to give a full-length political history of the clan which gave India one of her greatest sons.

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<sup>1</sup> *CHI*, i, pp. 150-57; S. Stevenson, *Heart of Jainism*; B. C. Law, *Mahāvira: His Life and Teachings*; Hoernle, in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, *Mahāvira and Jainism*, etc.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE MALLAS

#### *Early History and Status*

The Mallas are not referred to in any of the Vedic sources in the sense of a tribe, but only in the sense of "professional wrestlers."<sup>1</sup> Hence the word does not find a place in the *Vedic Index*. The Mallas as a tribe are first referred to in the list of the sixteen *Mahājanapadas* in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* and other Buddhist texts.<sup>2</sup> In the *Majjhima Nikāya* the Mallas, along with the Licchavis, are quoted as being typical examples of a *saṅgha* or *gaṇa*.<sup>3</sup> The Mallakas are mentioned among the communities living by the title of *rājā* in the *Arthaśāstra*.<sup>4</sup>

The list of sixteen *Mahājanapadas* is found in many sources and this suggests that it should be taken to refer to the political divisions of India shortly before the time that Buddhism arose, if not earlier. This view is strengthened by the fact that Aṅga, which was once an independent political unit, had already become a part of the Magadhan kingdom at the time of the Buddha.<sup>5</sup> The fate of Kāśī, also mentioned in the list, had been sealed with its conquest by its rival, the Kosalan kingdom.<sup>6</sup> The list is interesting and significant in that its components are names, not of countries, but of peoples. This shows that the main idea in the minds of those who drew up or used this old list was still of tribal and not geographical designations.<sup>7</sup> In our opinion this also indicates the antiquity of the Mallas and points to the difficulty in accurately locating them geographically.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Monier Williams, *Skt.-Eng. Dic.*, s.v. *Malla*.

<sup>2</sup> *Aṅguttara*, i, p. 213; iv, pp. 252, 256, 260; *Mahāvastu*, i, p. 34; ii, p. 2; iii, pp. 208ff; *Dīgha*, ii, p. 235; cf. *Vinaya*, ii, p. 146 fn; *CHI*, i, pp. 172ff; *PHAI*, pp. 95ff; *DPPN*, ii, pp. 453-4.

<sup>3</sup> *Majjhima*, i, p. 231.

<sup>4</sup> *Arthaśāstra*, xi, pp. 376ff; cp. Pāṇini, iv, 2, 120.

<sup>5</sup> *Vinaya*, i, p. 179; *Jāt.*, v, p. 316; vi, p. 271; cf. Rhys Davids, *Buddhist India*, p. 23; *CHI*, i, p. 173.

<sup>6</sup> *Saṃyutta*, i, p. 83; ii, p. 403; *Jāt.*, iv, pp. 343, 442; v, p. 41; cf. Rhys Davids, *Buddhist India*, pp. 3ff, 24ff.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Rhys Davids, *Buddhist India*, p. 23; *CHI*, i, p. 173.

We know that the Videhas were an older people, as they are clearly mentioned in the *Brāhmaṇa* texts,<sup>1</sup> and that the Licchavis, who are not mentioned in these sources, were comparatively latecomers.<sup>2</sup> The position of the Mallas is much the same as that of the Licchavis in point of time, or perhaps even a little earlier.<sup>3</sup> The Mallas are referred to in the *Mahābhārata*, whereas the Licchavis are not.<sup>4</sup> This may be due to the fact that at the time of the first composition of the Epic the Licchavis still occupied northern regions and had not yet moved southwards to Vesālī.<sup>5</sup>

All the sources appear to take the Mallas as a single political entity, but there is evidence that they were divided into two branches. As both branches of this tribe had the same form of government, it might have seemed irrelevant to the ancient writers to take note of the partition in this connection. It is, however, evident from the account of the last scene of the Buddha's life depicted in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* <sup>6</sup> that the Mallas were no longer a single political entity. Perhaps that is why each branch claimed a separate share in the relics of the Buddha. Likewise, each section built a *stūpa* and gave a feast to mark this event. Though ethnically the same people with the same form of government, the partitioned territories had their own land with their centres of political power at Pāvā and Kusinārā respectively.<sup>7</sup>

It appears likely that the Mallas were Kṣatriyas, like the Videhas, the Licchavis and the Nāyas. They came from the Madhyadeśa, the "Middle Country," probably after the Videhas. They are often referred to as Vāseṭṭhas <sup>8</sup> after the Brāhmaṇic *gotra* they had adopted, in keeping with the practice of other clans of northeast India of that period. The deaths of the great founders of Buddhism and Jainism in two Malla capitals brought forth many a significant passage in the Pāli and the Prākṛit texts which help us in discussing the republican institutions of these peoples.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. above, pp. 137ff.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. above, pp. 88ff.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Oldenberg, *Buddha*, p. 399 fn.

<sup>4</sup> *Mbh.* (Poona edn.), *Bhīṣma*, 10, 45, *Sabhā*, 27, 3-11, etc.; cf. Sørensen, *Mbh. Names Index*, s.v. *Malla*.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. above, pp. 91ff.

<sup>6</sup> *Dīgha*, ii, pp. 72ff., especially pp. 164ff.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 164ff.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 163ff.



### *Name and Etymology*

They are referred to as Mallas in the Pāli texts <sup>1</sup> and Mallaī in the Jaina Prākṛit books.<sup>2</sup> The Sanskrit Jaina commentator Jinaprabhamuni also mentions them as Mallas,<sup>3</sup> whereas Kauṭilya refers to them as Mallakas.<sup>4</sup> The word *Malla* also figures in the Sanskrit, Pāli and Prākṛit lexicons in the sense of a "professional wrestler," apart from being the name of this tribe. On this point B. C. Law comments that "it is probable that the word 'Malla' denoting a professional wrestler was derived from the tribal name of this people".<sup>5</sup> This is a fair judgement.

The usage of the name Malla to mean "wrestler" or "boxer" may have been a secondary one. Perhaps in the Malla tribe the menfolk were highly skilled in the art of wrestling and were widely recognized as such. Thus, this tribal name also began to be applied to professional wrestlers, many of whom were actually members of the Malla tribe in early times.<sup>6</sup> The *Vālodaka Jātaka* refers to 500 page-boys of Sāvattthi who wrestled like the very Mallians.<sup>7</sup>

For a tribal name to be adopted as a professional one is by no means unique as it has its parallels in the Māgadhas and the Videhas, whom Manu treats as professional groups.<sup>8</sup> That these were two ancient tribes is unquestionable. Similar is the case of the Ahīrs of today, the Ābhīras of earlier times. When the word Malla occurs in the pre-Buddhist literature it may apply to the Mallas as a tribe and as professional wrestlers at the same time.<sup>9</sup>

### *Geographical Location*

Their country is designated as *Malla-Janapada* in the Sanskrit version of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*,<sup>10</sup> and references to *Malla-*

<sup>1</sup> *Loc. cit.*; *Majjhima*, i, p. 231; *Aṅguttara*, i, p. 213; iv, p. 252, etc.

<sup>2</sup> *Nirayāvalikā*, ed. Warren, pp. 27ff; *Kalpa Sūtra*, sec. 128, etc.

<sup>3</sup> *Comm. on Kalpa Sūtra*, sec. 128ff.

<sup>4</sup> *Arthaśāstra*, xi, pp. 376ff.

<sup>5</sup> *TAI*, p. 259.

<sup>6</sup> *Jāt.*, ii, p. 231; iv, pp. 148ff.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, ii, pp. 96ff; *cp. Cīvaravastu*, pp. 3, 35-7.

<sup>8</sup> Manu, x, 22; xii, 45.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Monier Williams, *Skt.-Eng. Dic.*, s.v. *Malla*. The root from which the word is derived is not certain, but may have been *mal* or *mall*, to hold, to possess. Cf. Pāṇini, *Dhātupāṭha*, xiv, 22-3; xxxv, 84.

<sup>10</sup> *MPS*, pp. 252, 264 (*malleṣu janapadeṣu*).

*raṭṭha*,<sup>1</sup> the *Malla-rāṣṭra* of the *Mahābhārata*,<sup>2</sup> *Malla-bhū* or *Malla-bhūmi*<sup>3</sup> and *Malla-gaṇa*<sup>4</sup> are by no means lacking. It is fairly certain that the territories of the Mallas of Pāvā and those of Kusinārā were divided during the lifetime of the Buddha by a natural frontier, the river Hiraññavatī.<sup>5</sup> The *Dīgha Nikāya* mentions a river Kakutthā<sup>6</sup> and Rhys Davids, without comment or criticism, takes this very Kakutthā to be the boundary river which the Buddha crossed going from the territory of the Paveyya-Mallas into that of the Kosināraka-Mallas.<sup>7</sup> This, however, is a mistake that can be easily corrected by examining the various versions of the text in Sanskrit, Pāli, Tibetan, and Chinese. The account of the last journey of the Buddha is almost the same in all the texts, save for one major disagreement which concerns the name of the river dividing the territories of the Mallas of Pāvā from that of the Mallas of Kusinārā.

In all the versions of the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* it is said that there were two rivers which the Buddha and his host of followers crossed between Pāvā and Kusinārā.<sup>8</sup> None of the Pāli versions name the first river.<sup>9</sup> At his Master's repeated commands to fetch water from this river, Ānanda thrice gave the same reply—"But just now, Lord, about 500 carts have gone over. That water stirred up by the wheels has become shallow and flows foul and turbid. This river Kakutthā, Lord (*ayam bhante Kakutthā nadī*), not far off (*avidūre*), is clear and pleasant, cool and transparent . . . There the Exalted One may both drink the water and cool his limbs."<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, the Sanskrit version and the Tibetan and Chinese versions based on it, not only refer to this river whose water had become undrinkable as Kukustā, but also name the next river, with pure, cool water, as Hiranyavatī *nadī*.<sup>11</sup> This was the river Kakutthā of the corresponding Pāli version.

<sup>1</sup> *Dīgha*, iii, p. 207; *Jāt.*, v, p. 278; cf. *PHAI*, p. 126.

<sup>2</sup> vii, 34; cf. *PHAI*, pp. 126ff; Sørensen, *op. cit.*, s.v.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Monier Williams, *Skt. -Eng. Dic.*, s.v.

<sup>4</sup> *Majjhima*, i, p. 231; cf. *Pāli-Eng. Dic.* (PTS), s.v.

<sup>5</sup> *MPS*, p. 292 (Pāli version).

<sup>6</sup> *Dīgha*, ii, p. 129.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, tr., *Dialogues*, ii, pp. 139-40; cf. *PHAI*, pp. 126-7; Hardy, *op. cit.*, p. 356; Bigandet, *Legacy of Burmese Buddhism*, ii, p. 39 (Kakanda); cf. Oldenberg, *Buddha*, pp. 200-03.

<sup>8</sup> *MPS*, p. 266 (Pāli); *Dīgha*, ii, pp. 128-9; tr., *Dialogues*, ii, pp. 139-40.

<sup>9</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>10</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>11</sup> *Loc. cit.*; Rockhill, *op. cit.*, pp. 134ff.



The sources are certainly confused on this point. Only a few pages later, the Sanskrit, Tibetan and Chinese versions are confirmed by the Pāli version itself, which makes a contradictory statement to the effect that beyond the river Hiraññavatī stretched the territory of the Kosinārikā-Mallas. In the significant words of the Buddha to Ānanda, he says, "Come Ānanda, to the other bank of the river Hiraññavatī, to the Sāla grove of the Mallas in the Kusinārā garden; there shall we rest."<sup>1</sup> The corresponding Sanskrit, Tibetan, and Chinese versions in this context only state that they had reached Kuśinagarī,<sup>2</sup> though they mention the crossing of the Hiraṇyavatī river earlier. This affects our conclusion little. If we accept the earlier statement of the Pāli texts and Rhys Davids interpretation of it, we are left without the name of the dirty river. But Waldschmidt's text shows that the muddy river was the Kukustā and that which the Buddha crossed to reach the Sāla grove of the Mallas of Kusinārā was the Hiraṇyavatī, agreeing in this with the Buddha's words in the Pāli version.

It seems reasonable that, in the comparatively short distance transversed, only two rivers were crossed, and that the Pāli version has apparently confused the names, wrongly applying the name Kakutthā to the river elsewhere called Hiraññavatī. The Sanskrit version and the Tibetan and Chinese versions based thereon seem to be more authentic in this respect than the Pāli version, which calls the same river by two different names at two different places in the same context.<sup>3</sup> In fact the dirty river was called Kakutthā (in the Pāli version) or Kukustā (in the Sanskrit and other versions), and the pure, cool river on the other bank of which lay the Sāla grove of the Kosinārikā-Mallas, was the river Hiraññavatī, the Hiraṇyavatī of the Sanskrit, Tibetan and Chinese texts. Thus, these sources have preserved the historical fact that the river Hiraṇyavatī demarcated the boundaries between the Mallas of Pāvā and those of Kusinārā.

It is unfortunate that we are not sure about the outer boundaries of the Mallian territories. Here the sources are meagre and scholars differ with regard to their definite geographical situation. Rhys Davids states that the territory of these independent clans, "if

<sup>1</sup> *MPS*, p. 292; *Dīgha*, ii, p. 137.

<sup>2</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>3</sup> See also Rockhill, *op. cit.*, pp. 133-46.



we may trust the Chinese pilgrims, was on the mountain slopes to the east of the Sākiya-land, and to the north of the Vajjian Confederation".<sup>1</sup> Jayaswal suggests another location. "The Mallas," he says, "covered a large area to the south of the Śākyas and the east of the Vṛjis, from the district of Gorakhpur to that of Champaran . . .".<sup>2</sup> He further remarks that "the lower Mallas are called Dakṣiṇa Mallas in the *Sabhā-Parvan*, which places the higher Mallas next to Kosala".<sup>3</sup> Kusinārā has been identified by Cunningham with the village of Kāsiā in the east of the Gorakhpur district,<sup>4</sup> and this view has been strengthened by the discovery of a *stūpa* behind the *Nirvāṇa* temple.<sup>5</sup> Near this village (Kāsiā), a copper plate has been found bearing the inscription "the copper plate of the parinirvāṇa-caitya" (*parinirvāṇa-caitya-tāmrāpatra*).<sup>6</sup> This identification thus appears to be correct, although V. A. Smith would prefer to place Kusinārā in Nepal, beyond the first range of hills.<sup>7</sup>

Cunningham identifies Pāvā with modern Padraonā in the Gorakhpur district.<sup>8</sup> This does not seem philologically possible. It must have been somewhere near Kāsiā, for the sick Buddha could not have travelled very far on foot in so short a time.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, a section of people inhabiting these parts today still call themselves Mallas and claim to be Kṣatriyas.<sup>10</sup> In H. Panday's opinion, "they tally with the ancient Mallas as they have the title of Mallas; they claim origin from the ancestors of recognized Kṣatriyas; the generality of them do not take consecrations prescribed for the twice born: these are all indicative of a close affinity between the present day Mallas and the Mallas of ancient fame".<sup>11</sup>

Thus, the ancient Mallas should be located in the Gorakhpur district. They inhabited the land between the Licchavis of Vesālī

<sup>1</sup> Rhys Davids, *Buddhist India*, p. 26.

<sup>2</sup> Jayaswal, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109 fn. 2 based on *Mbh.* (Poona Edn.), *Sabhā P.* chaps. xxx, 3; xxxi, 12; 27, 11.

<sup>4</sup> *CAGIM*, pp. 430-3.

<sup>5</sup> Law, *TAI*, pp. 257ff.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Law, *loc. cit.*; *PHAI*, pp. 126-7; H. Panday, *JBORS* (1920), vi, pp. 262-5.

<sup>7</sup> Smith, *Early History of India* (4th edn.), p. 167 fn. 5; Smith, *JRAS*, 1902, p. 152.

<sup>8</sup> *CAGIM*, pp. 430ff.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Dīgha*, ii, pp. 125ff; H. Panday, *op. cit.*, p. 263.

<sup>10</sup> H. Panday, *loc. cit.*; Jayaswal, *Hindu Polity*, p. 51.

<sup>11</sup> H. Panday, *op. cit.*, p. 264.



and that of the Sakyas of Kapilavatthu, the Moriyas and Koliyas, to the east of the Kosalans, whose territory it probably was during the Brāhmanic period.<sup>1</sup> Kusinārā was not far to the south-east of Kapilavatthu, nor was Pāvā far from Vesālī.<sup>2</sup> To the south of the Mallas lay the territory of the Kālāmas of Kesaputta and the Ganges, and to the north lay the Himālayan hills bordering on their land.<sup>3</sup> But at the present stage of our knowledge, their exact boundaries cannot be ascertained.

### *Government and Organization*

The *Majjhima Nikāya*,<sup>4</sup> *Arthaśāstra*<sup>5</sup> and other texts clearly show that the Mallas had a *saṅgha* or a republican form of government. Buddhaghosa also comments that the chief Mallas administered the state in turn and those who were free from such duties engaged in trade, sometimes undertaking long caravan journeys.<sup>6</sup> The *Mahā-parinirvāṇa Sūtra* also records the Buddha's enumeration of different assemblies, while in the Malla territory, and a specific reference occurs to *Khattiya-parisam* (*Kṣatriya-pariṣadam*).<sup>7</sup>

There is yet another very significant passage in the same text which points to the fact that the Malla heads of families constituted their assembly. When Ānanda was about to introduce the Mallians who had arrived at the scene with their families and retinue, after receiving the news of the Buddha's approaching death in their Assembly hall, he (Ānanda) thought that if he presented the Mallas of Kusinārā one by one the entire night would pass away. Therefore he decided, "Let me, now, cause the Mallas of Kusinārā to stand in groups, each family in a group, and so present them . . . saying—'Lord'! a Malla of such and such a name, with his children, his wives, his retinue and his friends, humbly bows down to the feet of the Exalted One."<sup>8</sup>

This strongly suggests that the Mallas had an assembly consisting of the heads of families of the tribe, all of whom would be Kṣatriyas

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Political History, below, pp. 181ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Dīgha*, ii, pp. 72ff; Pandey, *op. cit.*, pp. 141-2 and his map of the political divisions of Bihar in the 6th century B.C.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. our map A; cf. *DPPN*, ii, p. 454.

<sup>4</sup> i, p. 231.

<sup>5</sup> xi, p. 376.

<sup>6</sup> *Sum. Vil.*, ii, p. 569; cf. *DPPN*, ii, p. 454.

<sup>7</sup> *MPS*, p. 234.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 364-6.



of the *Vaśiṣṭha-gotra*. They were all called *rājās* as were the Licchavis, or in Kauṭilya's terms they "lived by the title of *rājā*".<sup>1</sup> After the death of a certain member of the assembly, perhaps his eldest son took his father's seat and he was probably initiated into the assembly after a ceremony at the *Makuṭa-bandhana*.<sup>2</sup> The *Makuṭa-bandhana* appears, from its name, to have had some political significance for the ruling Mallas of Kusinārā apart from being a shrine. The Paveyya-Mallas<sup>3</sup> might also have had such a place for anointing the new members into the assembly.

Allusions to the seven fold conditions of prosperity of the Vajjians, expounded by the Buddha, are probably equally applicable to the Mallas, as they were a neighbouring people not much less influential in the League than the Licchavis. On the same analogy, it is likely that each branch of the Mallas had an assembly and a council, and that the latter, but not the former, met fairly frequently, carrying out the public administration of the republic.<sup>4</sup> As we have more evidence for the Kusinārian branch, we only discuss them here; we assume that the Mallas of Pāvā had more or less similar institutions.

When sent by the Buddha to inform the Mallas of Kusinārā of his approaching death, Ānanda found them in session in their assembly-hall, engaged in some public business.<sup>5</sup> When Ānanda went yet again to inform them that the Buddha had passed away, they were deliberating in the same assembly-hall about the funeral ceremony of the Exalted One.<sup>6</sup> From the context it appears that it was the General Assembly of the Kosinārakas which was in session, as they are reported to have been afflicted and grieved at this loss, along with their sons, daughters and wives. It is, however, not possible that all their sons, daughters and wives participated in the deliberations of the assembly. Probably after hearing of the Buddha's death in the assembly-hall, they went to their respective homes and told their families. It was at this time that all grieved. There is no definite evidence as to the exact number of the members who constituted the General Assembly, but it is not impossible that

<sup>1</sup> *Sum. Vil.*, iii, p. 971; *Arthaśāstra*, xi, pp. 376ff; Cf. Basham, *Wonder that was India*, p. 33.

<sup>2</sup> *Dīgha*, ii, pp. 163ff.

<sup>3</sup> *DPPN*, ii, pp. 453.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. above, Licchavis, pp. 111ff; *cp.* Majumdar *et. al.*, *HCIP*, ii, chap. xvii.

<sup>5</sup> *MPS*, p. 362.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 406; *Dīgha*, ii, p. 159.



they had a large assembly, all the members of which seldom attended the meetings. From the Jaina tradition <sup>1</sup> it appears that they had a much smaller body which carried out the decisions of the assembly. This council met frequently and in practice was the sovereign body of the republic.

The Jaina texts give us reason to believe that the council of the Mallas consisted of nine members (*nava-Mallaī*).<sup>2</sup> It was the Council of 18 (*nava-Mallaī and nava-Lecchāī*) which was consulted by Ceḍaga when Kuṇiya-Ajātasattu was harassing the confederates.<sup>3</sup> Again, at the death of the Nigantha Nāyaputta, it was the Council of nine Mallas and nine Licchavis who instituted the festival of lights to mark the passing away of Mahāvira.<sup>4</sup> This suggests that in the Vajjian Council the Mallas and the Licchavis had equal representation. But as we have seen, the Videhas <sup>5</sup> and probably also the Nāyas <sup>6</sup> were represented in this council, and at the death of the Buddha "eight Malla chiefs" (*aṭṭha Mallapāmokhā*) <sup>7</sup> intended to bear his corpse. Yet more significant is a following passage in which only "four Malla chiefs" (*cattaro Mallapāmokhā*) proceeded to set fire to the funeral pyre of the Exalted One.<sup>8</sup> This text suggests that the Mallas had a council of either eight or four.

The figure of nine Mallas given in the Jaina texts, who formed with the nine Licchavis the Vajjian Council of 18, may be accepted only insofar as it refers to the council of nine Malla chiefs from both the Pāvā and Kusinārā branches. If we take the eight Mallian chiefs who lifted the dead body of the Buddha to be different from the four chieftains who set fire to the pyre, we could conclude that it was the smaller body of four chiefs who formed the council, as they performed the more important function. But both sets of chiefs are called *Mallapāmokhās* in the text. In Professor Altekar's opinion, "the Malla state . . . had an executive of four members only, all of whom are known to have taken a prominent part at the funeral of the Buddha." <sup>9</sup> This seems probable, but it is by no means certain.

<sup>1</sup> *Nirayāvalikā*, ed. Warren, pp. 27ff; *Kalpa Sūtra*, sec. 128.

<sup>2</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>3</sup> Cf. above, pp. 124ff.

<sup>4</sup> *Kalpa Sūtra*, sec. 128.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. above, pp. 81ff.

<sup>6</sup> See below, pp. 165ff.

<sup>7</sup> MPS, p. 414; *Dīgha*, ii, p. 160.

<sup>8</sup> MPS, p. 424; *Dīgha*, ii, p. 163.

<sup>9</sup> Altekar, *State and Government*, p. 132.



If we assume that these four were among the nine Mallas of the Jai-nas, the corresponding council at Pāvā must have consisted of five. But all these hypotheses are extremely speculative since, as we have seen, it is by no means certain that the Jaina formula is strictly accurate, and other tribes may have been represented.<sup>1</sup>

The sources are silent about the length of the term of office. Like other members of the Vajjian Confederacy, they probably held their offices for life. Usually the meetings of their assembly and council took place in the assembly-hall (*santhāgāra*) built in the centre of the town.<sup>2</sup> Both branches of the Mallas had their own *santhāgāras*. When the Buddha arrived at Pāvā, the Mallas invited him to inaugurate their assembly-hall named Ubbhataka (so-called because of its height, according to the commentator), which had not long been built.<sup>3</sup> As we have already mentioned, the Mallas of Kusinārā had their own assembly-hall wherein Ānanda twice found them in session. The remains of the Buddha were also honoured in this hall for seven days after the cremation. It was in the same assembly-hall that the envoys of Magadha, Vesāli, Kapilavatthu, Allakappa, Rāmagāma, Pāvā, and Pippalivana were received when they arrived at Kusinārā to claim their shares in the relics of the Buddha.<sup>4</sup>

### *Foreign Relations*

The Mallas had sovereign rights in their territory, and also had the power to exile or punish those who deserved it, as did the Magadhan King Ajātasattu, King Pasenadi of Kosala, and the Licchavis of Vesāli.<sup>5</sup> But they were no longer a single political unit at the time of the Buddha, as we have already seen.<sup>6</sup> This must have been due to trouble amongst the Mallas themselves, which probably could not be settled except by dividing the territory into two.<sup>7</sup> The two branches of the Mallas do not appear to have had very cordial relations. A Buddhist tradition preserved in the Tibetan *Dulva* indicates that after the Buddha's death the Mallas of Pāvā were first to arrive at Kusinārā with their troops, and the words in which

<sup>1</sup> Cf. above, p. 177.

<sup>2</sup> MPS, p. 420; *Dīgha*, ii, p. 164; Rockhill, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

<sup>3</sup> *Dīgha*, iii, pp. 207ff.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, ii, pp. 164-6.

<sup>5</sup> *Majjhima*, i, p. 231.

<sup>6</sup> *Loc. cit.*; *Arthaśāstra*, xi, p. 376.

<sup>7</sup> Cp. Majumdar, *et. al.*, HCIP, ii, pp. 7-8.



they advanced their claim to the relics were rude and uncordial, if not inimical.<sup>1</sup> Usually, however, the two branches seem to have lived in peace with each other.

The fact that the Mallas were members of the Vajjian League suggests that they were on friendly terms with the Licchavis, the Videhas and the Nāyas. But there was some tension at times between the Mallas and the Licchavis, as is apparent from the story of *Mallarājaputta* Bandhula, who with his wife violated the *Abhisekha-pokkharṇī* of the Licchavis. This involved some fighting.<sup>2</sup> The same *Jātaka* informs us that although a Malla,<sup>3</sup> Bandhula was the general of the Kosalan forces. It was probably due to his own capability and his education at Takṣaśilā that he commanded such a high position in Kosala. This fact might also throw light on the Jaina belief that the Mallas, along with the Licchavis, were the *gaṇarājās* of Kāśi-Kosala. No disputes between the Kosalan kingdom and the Mallian republics are recorded, but this does not prove that the two had no quarrels.

We have already discussed the eastward migrations of the Licchavis and their occupation of what had been the kingdom of Janaka during the Brāhmaṇa period.<sup>4</sup> We also noted that Videgha Māthava led his people across the Sadānirā to the east, and that the river appears to have divided the territories of Kosala and Videha. The Mallas, like the Licchavis and the Sakyas, were a new people in the region.<sup>5</sup> It is feasible to suggest that, along with the Licchavis or a little earlier, the Mallas also moved towards the south from the Himālayan foothills and occupied parts of what had been Kosalan territory during the Brāhmaṇic period. In the Buddhist texts we find the Mallas occupying a tract of land between the Videhas of Mithilā and the Kosalan kingdom.<sup>6</sup> It may be that Bandhula, a Malla of Kusinārā, offered his services to Kosala with

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Rockhill, *op. cit.*, p. 145. "If you give us a portion, it is well, but if you will not give it, we will carry it off by force."

<sup>2</sup> *Jāt.*, iv, pp. 148ff.

<sup>3</sup> Incidentally his wife is named Mallikā.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. above, pp. 89ff.

<sup>5</sup> The Malloi people, whom Alexander encountered in the Panjab, are generally identified with the Mālavas of later Indian sources, but in fact the name is closer to Malla. It is possible that those western Mallas were the original stock, from which the eastern Mallas broke off.

<sup>6</sup> *Dīgha*, ii, pp. 72ff; cf. *CAGIM*, map xi, pp. 444-5; Basham, *Ājīvikas*, map.



a view to keeping the Kosalan king on good terms with the Mallas. The *Bhaddasāla Jātaka* further informs us that after the general had been treacherously killed along with his sons by King Pasenadi, the latter appointed Bandhula's sister's son, Digha-Kārāyana, as the commander of his armies. This man later betrayed the king to avenge his uncle and offered the royal insignia to Viḍūḍabha. Pasenadi fled and subsequently died outside the gates of Rājagaha.<sup>1</sup> The story points not only to the close relations between the republic and the kingdom, but also to the political intrigues going on between the two. That Mallikā after her husband Bandhula's death, is allowed to go to her home at Kusinārā, and that her sister-in-law's son is appointed to the place of her late husband<sup>2</sup> should not necessarily be interpreted literally. It might suggest that some Mallians, in order to avenge the death of Bandhula, allied themselves with Viḍūḍabha against king Pasenadi and the alliance achieved its purpose in Viḍūḍabha's accession to power and Pasenadi's death.<sup>3</sup> We know of no source which might indicate that the Mallas were ever controlled by the king of Kosala. On the other hand, the *Majjhima Nikāya*<sup>4</sup> shows that the Mallas were sovereign within their territories, as was the Kosalan king Pasenadi.

The *Nirayāvalikā* and other Jaina sources inform us that king Ceḍaga of Vesāli, who was the head of the Vajjian Confederacy, deliberated with the Mallian and the Licchavian *gaṇarājās* before the fight between the Magadhan king and the Vajjian Confederacy took place.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the Mallas were hostile to the Magadhan king and fought against him with other confederates of the Vajjian League.<sup>6</sup> But eventually they were defeated at the hands of Kuṇḍiya-Ajātasattu and as a result lost much of their power, at least in external affairs. Jinadāsa's *Āvaśyaka Cūrṇī* tells us a somewhat different story. The chieftains of the confederate armies, demoralized by two defeats, abandoned Ceḍaga and returned to their own cities.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Jāt.*, iv, pp. 150ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Jāt.*, iv, p. 151.

<sup>3</sup> There is yet another possibility, that the traditions of Bandhula and Kārāyana have some connection with Malla in the meaning of wrestler, as they served as mercenaries outside their tribe.

<sup>4</sup> i, p. 231.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. above, pp. 124ff.

<sup>6</sup> *Dīgha*, ii, pp. 72ff; cf. above, pp. 127ff.

<sup>7</sup> *Āvaśyaka Cūrṇī*, ii, pp. 172ff; cf. Basham, *Ājīvikas*, p. 70.



However, after its break-up by Ajātasattu the Vajjian Confederacy virtually disappeared as a political force.<sup>1</sup> The republics like that of the Mallas were probably left to govern their own affairs, but they had little political importance after this long, drawn-out war.<sup>2</sup>

### *Later Political History*

There are a few scattered references in the Buddhist Canon and the sacred books of the Jinas that attest to the existence of the Mallas before and after the death of the Buddha. These texts mainly preserve traditions of the time when the founders of their faith preached, and hence only indicate that the Mallas existed as political powers at that time. Kauṭilya also refers to them.<sup>3</sup> But in Pāṇini they are only implied in the term *Vṛji*,<sup>4</sup> and hence they do not figure in Kātyāyana or Patañjali.<sup>5</sup> The Mallas did not survive as long as did the Licchavis. (They disappeared as a republican tribe during the Mauryan period, or a little later.) Manu, following the unfavourable attitude of the Brāhmaṇa writers, brands the Mallas, as *Vrāṭyakṣatriyas*, or Kṣatriyas who had not gone through the initiation ceremony and were therefore degraded like their other neighbours.<sup>6</sup> This is perhaps because their rites and customs were not orthodox. Though individual families of the Malla chiefs crop up now and then in Tibet and Nepal upto c. 11th century A.D. and even later,<sup>7</sup> the Mallas of Pāvā and Kusinārā, at whose republican centres the two greatest teachers of 6th century B.C. India had taught and died, never again attained the political power and system of government which they certainly had during the lifetime of the Buddha and Mahāvira.

<sup>1</sup> Bhandarkar, *Car. Lects.*, p. 79.

<sup>2</sup> Basham, *Ājivikas*, pp. 69-74.

<sup>3</sup> *Arthaśāstra*, p. 376.

<sup>4</sup> Pāṇini, iv, 2, 131.

<sup>5</sup> Jayaswal, *Hindu Polity*, p. 50 fn. 11; *cf.* Mukerji, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-28.

<sup>6</sup> Manu, x, 22; *cf.* Oldenberg, *Buddha*, p. 399 fn.

<sup>7</sup> S. Lévi, *op. cit.*, ii, pp. 210-13; *cf.* Jayaswal, *Hindu Polity*, p. 50; H. Panday, *op. cit.*, pp. 262ff. Prof. Tucci connects them with the 14th. cen. Mallas of Nepal. *Cf. Nepal—the Discovery of the Malla*, pp. 57ff.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### THE SAKYAS

The simple fact that the Śākyamuni was the founder of their faith inspired the Buddhists to depict the Sakyas as the noblest of peoples, and Kapilavatthu as a most grand and luxuriant city, indeed, the very paradise of Jambūdvīpa.<sup>1</sup> This is not very surprising, keeping in view how the Jainas exalted the Nāyas, a humble clan though it was, bordering on the centre of the powerful Licchavis.<sup>2</sup> The shadow of the mighty Kosalan King Pasenadi, and more so of his son Viḍūḍabha, has rendered the real status of the Sakyas historically vague and politically uncertain. The information about their political institutions is at best fragmentary and at times contradictory. Some of the references indicate that the Sakyan territory had already become a part of the Kosalan kingdom at the time of the Buddha. Other references clearly show that the Sakyas of Kapilavatthu were an independent republican tribe and that their territory, though bordering on the Kosalan kingdom, was distinct from it. The Sakyas had sovereign rights within their territory before they were ruthlessly massacred at the hands of Viḍūḍabha and their city razed to the ground.

#### *Kosala versus Kapilavatthu*

Malalasekera is of the opinion that "in the sixth century B.C. the Sakyan territory of Kapilavatthu was subject to Kosala,"<sup>3</sup> because the *Sutta Nipāta* speaks of the Buddha's birthplace as belonging to the Kosalans.<sup>4</sup> In the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* also, Kapilavatthu is mentioned as being in Kosala.<sup>5</sup> In the *Majjhima Nikāya* Pasenadi is reported to have said, "the Lord is a noble like me, a Kosalan like me, eighty years old like me; and this in itself prompts me to pay such respect to the Lord and show him marks of affection."<sup>6</sup> Apart from these references quoted by Malalasekera to support his view,

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<sup>1</sup> *Lalitavistara*, p. 28; cf. *Jāt.*, v, pp. 412ff.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. above, pp. 97ff.

<sup>3</sup> *DPPN*, i, p. 696.

<sup>4</sup> *Sutta.*, verse 405.

<sup>5</sup> *Aṅguttara*, i, p. 276.

<sup>6</sup> *Majjhima*, ii, p. 124; cf., Rockhill, *op. cit.*, p. 114.



we find some more passages to the same effect. At one place the Buddha himself says, "King Pasenadi of Kosala is aware that the Samana Gotama has gone forth from the adjacent [*anantarā*] clan of the Sakyas. Now the Sakyas have become the vassals of king Pasenadi. They render him homage and respectful salutation, they rise and do him obeisance and treat him with ceremony. Now just as the Sakyas treat King Pasenadi of Kosala, so does the king treat the Tathāgata."<sup>1</sup> In the *Bhaddasāla Jātaka*, the Sakyas, upon receipt of the message of King Pasenadi asking them for a Sakyan princess in marriage, gathered together and deliberated: "We live in a place subject to the authority [*anāpavattiṭṭhāna*] of the king of Kosala; if we refuse a daughter, he will take offence; and if we give her, the custom of our clan will be broken. What are we to do?"<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, Rhys Davids first put forth the view that the Sakyans were a republican clan;<sup>3</sup> this has been challenged in some of its essential aspects. Watters is of the opinion that Kapilavatthu and the surrounding territory were included within the kingdom of Kosala, and that we cannot therefore speak of a Sakya king or kingdom.<sup>4</sup> Probably, Watters based his view on the authority of some of the passages quoted above, but the evidence is not conclusive. The only ground in support of Watters' view, in Majumdar's opinion, "is the expression *anāpavattiṭṭhāna* used, with reference to Kosala, by the Śākyaas themselves about their territory in the introductory episode of the *Bhaddasāla Jātaka* . . ."<sup>5</sup> The full significance of the expression is, however, far from definite. The same *Jātaka* clearly shows that Kapilavatthu was outside the boundaries of the kingdom of Kosala. We are informed that while Viḍūḍabha resolved to destroy the Sakyans, the Buddha set out from Kapilavatthu and sat beneath a tree not far from the city. "Hard by that place, a huge and shady banyan tree stood on the boundary of Viḍūḍabha's realms."<sup>6</sup> "This clearly proves," says Majumdar, "that the Śākya territory just touched the border, but was outside the jurisdiction of the Kosala kingdom."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Dīgha*, iii, pp. 83-84.

<sup>2</sup> *Jāt.*, iv, p. 145.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Rhys Davids, *Buddhist India*, pp. 17-21; *CHI*, i, pp. 175-7; Majumdar *Corporate Life*, pp. 234ff.

<sup>4</sup> *On Yuan-Chwang*, ii, pp. 3ff.

<sup>5</sup> Majumdar, *Corporate Life*, p. 235.

<sup>6</sup> *Jāt.*, iv, p. 152; *tato avidūre Viḍūḍabhassa rajjasimāva* . . .

<sup>7</sup> Majumdar, *Corporate Life*, p. 235.



The claim of Malalasekera, which is also supported by Jayaswal <sup>1</sup> and H. C. Raychaudhuri <sup>2</sup> in addition to Watters, cannot, however, be lightly dismissed, though none of the scholars mentioned has investigated the question thoroughly. The passages quoted above appear to show that the Sakyas were subordinate to Pasenadi, the king of Kosala, and that they probably "rendered to him homage and respectful salutation." However, if the sources are examined closely, the position of the Sakyas emerges clearly as that of an independent people who were not completely subordinate to the king of Kosala. They might well have been afraid of his power, just as the Licchavis, Mallas, Videhas and Nāyas were probably afraid of the ambitious monarch Ajātasattu of Magadha. That the Sakyas were independent is shown by their presence at Kusinārā at the last scene of the Buddha's life. They claimed a share of the relics on the grounds that the deceased was a Sakyan, the pride of the Sakyans.<sup>3</sup> That the Nāyas and the Videhas who were republican peoples did not claim a share suggests that the Licchavis, the most powerful confederate of the Vajjian League, had supreme control over their territories. If the Videhas and the Nāyas were absolutely independent there seems to be no reason that could possibly have stopped them from that claim, save of course that they may not have cared for the Buddha, which even minor clans like the Koliyas of Rāmagāma, the Bulis of Allakappa and the Moriyas of Pipphalivana advanced.<sup>4</sup> This indicates that the Sakyas, like the Mallas, were technically independent and not legally subordinate to the Kosalan king.

We do not know why the Kosalan king did not claim a share in the relics of the Buddha, but we do know that both Kosalan kings, Pasenadi and his successor Viḍūḍabha <sup>5</sup> were well disposed towards the Śākyamuni. It may be that the distance of Sāvattī from Kusinārā and the presence of the hostile Ajātasattu's envoys did not particularly encourage the Kosalan king to claim a part of the relics. Probably the death of the Buddha took place after King Pasenadi had passed away at the gates of Rājagaha,<sup>6</sup> and his

<sup>1</sup> Jayaswal, *Hindu Polity*, p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> *PHAI*, p. 99.

<sup>3</sup> *Dīgha*, ii, p. 165; *cp.* Rockhill, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

<sup>4</sup> *Dīgha*, ii, pp. 164ff; Rockhill, *op. cit.*, pp. 145ff.

<sup>5</sup> *Jāt.*, iv, pp. 152, 153.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 151; *Majjhima*, ii, p. 124; Rockhill, *op. cit.*, p. 114.



power-loving son was not very enthusiastic about things religious and theological.<sup>1</sup> The fact that the Kosalans did not claim a share of the relics at Kusinārā does not exclude the possibility of their taking away, after Viḍūḍabha's invasion, the share which the Sakyas had carried to Kapilavatthu. If the Kosalan king was the overlord of the Sakyas, he might have been expected to insist on building the *stūpa* at Sāvatthi and not at Kapilavatthu, if only for the sake of prestige. Moreover, the relics would be thought of great value for their supernatural powers in bringing good fortune to the region in which they were deposited. This also supports the view that the Sakyas were not fully subordinate to Viḍūḍabha at that time.

Whenever the Buddha was at Kapilavatthu or any of the Sakyan towns, he is almost invariably mentioned as "dwelling among the Sakyas at Kapilavatthu", "Cātuma" or "Devadaha," and the instances can be further multiplied.<sup>2</sup> A dialogue between the Buddha and Ambaṭṭha, who had not been respectfully received by the Sakyan assembly, also indicates that the Sakyas were independent and had their own territory. The Buddha pacifies him saying, "Why a quail, Ambaṭṭha, little hen-bird though she be, can say what she likes in her own nest. And there the Sakyas are at their own home, in Kapilavatthu. It is not fitting for you to take offence at so trifling a thing."<sup>3</sup>

More suggestive is the *Dhamma-Cetiya-Sutta*<sup>4</sup> which describes a chariot journey of the Kosalan King Pasenadi on his way to greet the Buddha. The *Sutta* begins, "Once when the Lord was staying in the Sakyan country, at Medataḷumpa which was one of their [Sakyan] townships, Pasenadi, the King of Kosala was at Nangaraka . . . and asked [Dīgha Kārāyana] where the Lord was then staying. Being told that he was at Medataḷumpa, the Sakyan township, the King asked how far away it was. It was not far—only some three leagues . . ." <sup>5</sup> "He urged his charioteer to take him to the Sakyan Medataḷumpa where the Buddha was then sojourning. Pasenadi reached that place and praised the Buddha for his absolute control

<sup>1</sup> *Jāt.*, iv, pp. 147ff; Rockhill, *op. cit.*, pp. 116ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Dīgha*, i, p. 91; *Majjhima*, i, pp. 91, 246, 353, 457; ii, pp. 118, 214, 243; iii, pp. 109, 110; *Saṃyutta*, iv, p. 182, etc.

<sup>3</sup> *Dīgha*, i, p. 91.

<sup>4</sup> *Majjhima*, ii, pp. 118ff.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 118-19.

of his audience while the king himself was repeatedly interrupted while trying the cases as the supreme judge . . .".<sup>1</sup> If the Sakyan territory were under Pasenadi's control, the Buddha would probably not have been mentioned as being "in Sakyan country," or "at one of the Sakyan townships, Medatallumpa".

Although in the same *Sutta* Pasenadi is reported as saying, *Bhagavā pi Kosalaka, aham pi Kosalako*,<sup>2</sup> this is an obvious example of contradiction in the sources. However, it can be explained if we keep in mind the fact that the sources were written later than the events they claim to depict, and that some historical facts have been mishandled and misplaced by the writers. That the Sakyas were extinguished as a political power by Viḍūḍabha and that the survivors may have become Kosalans at a later time seems certain, but the sources appear to have intermingled earlier and later events. The passages cited above impel us to suggest that the Sakyas were an independent political community during the Pasenadi's reign and the earlier part of Viḍūḍabha's; in other words, the Sakyas were independent at least until the time of the Buddha's death, when they claimed a share in his relics and later built a *stūpa* in its honour at their capital town.<sup>3</sup>

### *Form of Government*

Tied in with the question of Sakyan sovereignty is the controversy regarding their form of government. We hear at one place that Bhaddiya, a young cousin of the Buddha, was *rājā*,<sup>4</sup> at another that the Buddha's father, Suddhodana, held that rank,<sup>5</sup> while elsewhere he is spoken of as a mere clansman, "Suddhodana the Sakyan".

Rhys Davids has shown, on the authority of the Pāli canon,<sup>6</sup> that the Sakyas had "a single chief, . . . elected as office holder, presiding over the Senate, and, if no Senate were in session, over the state. He bore the title of *Rāja* which in this connection does not mean king, but rather something like the Roman consul, or the Greek archon." <sup>7</sup> This view is supported by Malalasekera when he

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 119-22.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124; *cf.* above, pp. 12ff.

<sup>3</sup> *Dīgha*, ii, p. 167.

<sup>4</sup> *Vinaya*, ii, p. 181.

<sup>5</sup> *Dīgha*, ii, p. 52; *cf.* Rhys Davids, in *CHI*, i, pp. 177ff; and his *Buddhist India*, pp. 19ff.

<sup>6</sup> Rhys Davids, *Buddhist India*, pp. 17ff; *CHI*, i, pp. 175ff.

<sup>7</sup> *CHI*, i, p. 177; *Buddhist India*, p. 19.



says that "the Sākyans evidently had no king. Theirs was a republican form of government probably with a leader, elected from time to time."<sup>1</sup> In Oldenberg's opinion as well, "at the head of this [Sakyan] aristocratic community there must have been some leading man, appointed with the title of king, which can scarcely in this case have indicated more than the position of *primus inter pares*."<sup>2</sup> Jayaswal<sup>3</sup> and Majumdar<sup>4</sup> are also of the opinion that the Sakyas were a republic.

Weak though his arguments may be, Professor D. R. Bhandarkar has advanced different claims. He asserts that "no office holder was appointed by the Śākyas from time to time as Rhys Davids suggested. The Pāli canon speaks only once of a Śākya king Bhaddiya, *Bhaddiyo Sakyarājā Sakyānam rajjam kārenti*. He was most probably hereditary and not a president, *mukhya or grāmaṇi*."<sup>5</sup> He further adds that "the preambles of some *Jātakas* [nos. 466 and 536] make us infer that the Śākyas were a *gaṇa* and not a *kula*, but the Canonical texts are earlier and more authentic, which makes the Śākya a kingly tribe and not a *gaṇa*."<sup>6</sup> Rhys Davids has shown at least two cases in the Pāli canon where two different Sakyans are called *rājās*. The one referred to by Bhandarkar had already been noticed by Rhys Davids as early as 1903, at least 15 years before Bhandarkar wrote, and the former scholar was fully aware of Bhaddiya being called a *rājā*.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, Rhys Davids also added in the same sentence, "and in another passage, Suddhodana, the Buddha's father [who is elsewhere spoken of as a simple citizen, Suddhodana the Sākiyan], is called the *rājā*." We admit that Rhys Davids did not locate the evidence for *Suddhodana rājā* in the texts, but the fact remains that he did mention more than one Sakya being called a *rājā*. Long before Rhys Davids, Oldenberg had shown that the Sakyan king was no more than a chief, and that the idea that the Buddha's father, Suddhodana, enjoyed this royal dignity was quite foreign to the oldest forms in which the traditions regarding the family are presented to us. "Rather we have nothing (more or less)

<sup>1</sup> *DPPN*, ii, p. 970.

<sup>2</sup> Oldenberg, *Buddha*, p. 99.

<sup>3</sup> Jayaswal, *Hindu Polity*, p. 43.

<sup>4</sup> Majumdar, *Corporate Life*, pp. 236ff.

<sup>5</sup> *Car. Lects.*, p. 161; also Law, in *HCIP*, ii, p. 16.

<sup>6</sup> *Loc. cit.*, fn. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Rhys Davids, *Buddhist India*, p. 19.



to contemplate in Suddhodana than one of the great and wealthy landowners of the Sakya race, whom later legends first formed into the 'great king Suddhodana'." <sup>1</sup>

Bhandarkar quoted *Buddhist India* in respect of Rhys Davids' claim that the Sakyas were a republican clan, but he ignored the reference to a second king of the Sakyas, perhaps because it went against his theory. Bhandarkar also shows complete ignorance of Oldenberg's similar view that the Sakyas were an aristocratic government, and not a monarchy. Rhys Davids first wrote when most of the Pāli canon was unpublished. Later, in the *Cambridge History of India*,<sup>2</sup> he gave the reference for Suddhodana's kingship in the *Dīgha Nikāya*,<sup>3</sup> Bhandarkar himself admits this to be of an earlier date and more authentic than the *Jātakas*.

On this account Majumdar did not let Bhandarkar go unchallenged.<sup>4</sup> Criticizing Bhandarkar's theory, Majumdar finally brought out evidence from the *Jātakas* that the Sakyas were a republican community, as first expounded by Oldenberg and Rhys Davids. He says that "it may be pointed out, . . . that the introductory episodes of the *Jātakas* seem to prove that the constitution of the Śākya was not unlike that of the Licchavis." <sup>5</sup> Majumdar substantiates his statement from the *Kuṇāla Jātaka* <sup>6</sup> which describes a feud between the Sakyas and their neighbouring republic, the Koliyas. In his opinion, "a careful study of the whole account hardly leaves any doubt that the Śākya were governed on the same principle as the Licchavis." <sup>7</sup> Thus, when the quarrel grew serious over the waters of the river Rohiṇī, which each party wanted for irrigation, the Sakyas went and told the "councillors appointed to such services and they reported it to the multitude of kings of royal families".<sup>8</sup> It was then resolved, apparently by these kings, that they should fight, and so the Sakyas "sallied forth, ready for the fray". The number of these kings is not definitely stated, but it must have been considerable in view of the fact that 250 princes

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<sup>1</sup> Oldenberg, *Buddha*, p. 99.

<sup>2</sup> i, p. 177.

<sup>3</sup> ii, p. 52.

<sup>4</sup> Majumdar, *Corporate Life*, pp. 235ff.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 236.

<sup>6</sup> *Jāt.*, v, pp. 412ff.

<sup>7</sup> Majumdar, *Corporate Life*, p. 236.

<sup>8</sup> *Jāt.*, vi, p. 413.



were offered as escorts for the Buddha, who intervened in the feud.<sup>1</sup>

There is not the least allusion to any individual royal authority in this circumstantial narrative, and moreover the chiefs of the Sakyas are all called kings.<sup>2</sup> "Why are ye come here, mighty kings," asked the Buddha. Elsewhere we have the expression "the kings said . . ." <sup>3</sup> In the *Samudda-Vāṇija Jātaka*, Devadatta laments the fact that he has been rejected by all "kings of the Sakyas."<sup>4</sup> Similarly, we learn from the *Bhaddasāla Jātaka* how King Pasenadi sent his envoy asking, "Please give me one of your daughters in marriage, for I wish to become connected with your family".<sup>5</sup> On receipt of this message it was the Sakyas who gathered and deliberated in their *santhāgāra*. According to the time-honoured custom, ambassadors are dispatched by one sovereign to another, if there be any, and the omission of the king in this respect strengthens the assumption that the Sakyas had no king in the sense of a sole hereditary monarch.<sup>6</sup> It is true that Vāsabhakhattiyā, born of a slave woman and Mahānāma, is referred to by the Buddha as "a king's daughter."<sup>7</sup> But on the preceeding page of the same *Jātaka* Mahānāma is referred to simply as "Mahānāma the Sakya".<sup>8</sup> Vāsabhakhattiyā also tells her son Viḍūḍabha, "My boy, your grandsires are the Sakyan kings," and the young Sakyans are referred to as "princes".<sup>9</sup>

Thus there is little doubt that (the Sakyan state was a non-monarchical political community) as Rhys Davids had suggested, and not a monarchical one ruled by a hereditary king, as D. R. Bhandarkar wrongly claimed. The instances quoted support the view of Majumdar, that (the "Śākya like the Licchavis had a number of *rājas*, who were probably members of the supreme assembly ruling over the state").<sup>10</sup> Apart from the Sakyan kings the *Kuṇāla Jātaka* also refers to *uparājās*,<sup>11</sup> or viceroys who sallied forth against the Koliyas. This makes it probable that the Sakyan

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 412-4; cf. Majumdar, *Corporate Life*, p. 236.

<sup>2</sup> Majumdar, *Corporate Life*; cf. Mukerji, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-28.

<sup>3</sup> *Jāt.*, v, pp. 413-14.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, iv, p. 158.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Majumdar, *Corporate Life*, p. 237.

<sup>7</sup> *Jāt.*, iv, p. 148; cf. Hardy, *op. cit.*, p. 227.

<sup>8</sup> *Jāt.*, iv, p. 147.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 146-47.

<sup>10</sup> Majumdar, *Corporate Life*, p. 238

<sup>11</sup> *Jāt.*, v, p. 413. For detailed discussion see below, pp. 195ff.



*rājās'* eldest sons were designated *uparājās* like the Licchavian *rājās* and took their seats in the assembly after the deaths of their fathers.<sup>1</sup> Thus the Sakyas appear to present striking similarities with the Licchavis of Vesālī.<sup>2</sup>

### *Name and Etymology*

The name of the Buddha's clan is spelt differently in various Pāli texts but the two most common variants are *Sakya* and *Sakka*. Most frequent of all is *Sakya* which besides the later *Jātakas* appears in the *Dīgha Nikāya* alone at least 31 times.<sup>3</sup> In the *Majjhima Nikāya* the word occurs 28 times in this form.<sup>4</sup> In the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* it also occurs 18 times.<sup>5</sup> In the form *Sakka* the name occurs less frequently. In the locative plural, the name nearly always occurs as *Sakkesu*,<sup>6</sup> though we have also found it twice as *Sakyesu*.<sup>7</sup> The usual form of the name in the genitive singular is also almost universally *Sakkassa*.<sup>8</sup> However, in the genitive plural the word occurs most commonly as *Sakyānam*,<sup>9</sup> and only a few times as *Sakkānam*.<sup>10</sup> The form *Sakko* most commonly figures in the *Majjhima Nikāya*.<sup>11</sup> It does not occur in this form in the *Dīgha Nikāya* at all and appears only twice in the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*.<sup>12</sup> The name occurs quite commonly in the plural as *Sakyā*.

It is probably derived from the Sanskrit root *śak* (*śaknoti*, rarely *śakyati* or *śakyate*), meaning "to be able," "worthy," "possible," or "practicable."<sup>13</sup> It appears that in Sanskrit both *Śākya* and *Śakya* are correct. We have taken Pāli *Sakya* (Sanskrit *Śākya*),

<sup>1</sup> Cf. below, pp. 195ff.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Majumdar, *Corporate Life*, p. 238; Law, *TAI*, p. 254.

<sup>3</sup> *Dīgha*, i, pp. 87-88, 90-93, etc.; ii, pp. 91, 166, 274; iii, 83, 84, 117, 196, etc.

<sup>4</sup> *Majjhima*, i, pp. 109, 285, 290, 353-4, 457, 502; ii, p. 214, etc.

<sup>5</sup> *Saṃyutta*, i, pp. 87, 184; iii, p. 5; iv, pp. 124, 182-4; v, pp. 2, 3-35, 405, etc.

<sup>6</sup> *Dīgha*, i, pp. 92ff; iii, p. 117; *Majjhima*, i, pp. 91, 108, 246, 353; ii, pp. 118, 243; *Saṃyutta*, i, pp. 26, 87, 117, 119, 184; iii, pp. 5, 91; iv, pp. 124, 182; v, pp. 327, 369, 396, etc.

<sup>7</sup> *Saṃyutta*, v, p. 2; *Dīgha*, i, p. 92.

<sup>8</sup> *Dīgha*, i, p. 91; *Majjhima*, i, p. 246; iii, pp. 109, 110, etc.

<sup>9</sup> *Dīgha*, i, pp. 92-3; iii, p. 117; *Majjhima*, i, pp. 353-4, 457; ii, pp. 118-9; *Saṃyutta*, i, pp. 87, 184; iii, p. 5; iv, p. 124; v, p. 2, etc.

<sup>10</sup> *Dīgha*, i, p. 91; *Majjhima*, ii, pp. 118, 214; *Saṃyutta*, iv, p. 124.

<sup>11</sup> *Majjhima*, i, pp. 91, 108, 299; ii, p. 119, etc.

<sup>12</sup> *Saṃyutta*, v, pp. 375, 405.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Monier Williams, *Skt.-Eng. Dic.*, s.v. *śak*; *Pāli-Eng. Dic.*, s.v. *sak*.



which figures most frequently in the earlier texts, as the standard form. Rhys Davids, on phonological grounds accepts the name as *Sākiya*.<sup>1</sup> However, this form only occurs twice in the *Dīgha Nikāya*,<sup>2</sup> though it is most common in the *Jātakas*.<sup>3</sup>

The *Dīgha Nikāya* is the only Pāli text known to us which helps to explain the derivation of the name of the Sakyas. During a conversation of the Buddha with Ambaṭṭha, the former explains why they are called Sakyas and tells a legend which may be based on historical fact. He says, "Long ago, Ambaṭṭha, king Okkāka [?Ikṣavāku], wanting to divert the succession in favour of the [younger] son of his favourite queen, banished his elder children—Okkāma, Karaṇḍa, Hatthinika and Sinipura—from the land. And being thus banished they took up their dwelling on the slopes of the Himālayas, on the borders of a lake where a mighty oak tree [*sāko*, Skt. *śāka*] grew. And through fear of injuring the purity of their line they intermarried with their sisters. Now Okkāka, the king, asked the ministers at his court: 'Where sirs, are the children now? There is a spot, sire, on the slopes of the Himālayas, on the borders of a lake, where there grows a mighty oak [*sāko*]. There they do dwell. And lest they should injure the purity of their line they have married their own (*sakāhi*) sisters.' Then did Okkāka the king burst forth in admiration: '*Sakyā vata bho kumārā, parama-sakyā vata bho rājakumārā*'". This Rhys Davids renders as "Hearts of oak (*sakyā*) are those young fellows! Right well they hold their own (*paramasakyā*)."<sup>4</sup> "That is the reason, Ambaṭṭha," the Buddha continued, "why they are known as Sakyas".<sup>5</sup>

It might appear that the Pāli word *sāko* is here used in the sense of an oak tree, but we do not find such a meaning listed in the Sanskrit and the Pāli dictionaries. Thus the connection of a word *sāko* meaning "oak" and the name of the Buddha's clan is very doubtful. Rhys Davids commented in this connection that "the oak (which does not grow in the text, and could not grow in the Terai) has been introduced to enable the word play to be adequately rendered. The Pāli *saka* means a "herb." <sup>6</sup> We think that

<sup>1</sup> Rhys Davids, *Buddhist India*, pp. 17ff, 90, 100, 130, 133, 259, etc.; *CHI*, i, pp. 175ff., 181-2, 199, 204, 209, etc.

<sup>2</sup> *Dīgha*, ii, p. 166.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Jāt.*, vi, s.v. *Sākiya*.

<sup>4</sup> Tr., *Dialogues*, i, p. 115.

<sup>5</sup> *Dīgha*, ii, pp. 92, 93; cf. *Sum. Vil.*, i, p. 258; *Par. Jot.*, i, pp. 352ff.

<sup>6</sup> *Dialogues*, i, p. 115, fn. 2.



the exclamation of the king quoted above, while not losing sight of the context, should be translated as, "The princes are very powerful (*sakyā*)! Very powerful indeed (*parama-sakya vatabho*) are the royal princes." The authors of this passage might have intended a word-play or pun. The word *śāka* in Pāli, as we have noted, normally means an herb, and in Sanskrit the corresponding *śāka* also means the same.<sup>1</sup> The word *śaktā* means "able," "competent for," and "equal to".<sup>2</sup> We suggest that the name of the tribe is connected with the root *śak*. In Pāli the word *sakya* is used in the sense of "capable," with no ethnic connotation.<sup>3</sup>

B.C. Law associates the name with the *śāka* tree. He relies in this respect on Bharata, the commentator of *Amarakoṣa*, but gives no reference to the passage. However, Law translated the relevant piece from the *Koṣa*, "*Śāka* is a kind of tree. A king of the Ikṣavāku dynasty is known as Śākya because he lives near the *śāka* tree. His posterity was known as Śākyas."<sup>4</sup> This bears a close resemblance to the Pāli passage quoted above, which is also found in the *Sumaṅgala Vilāsinī* and the *Sutta Nipāta* commentary.<sup>5</sup> The Tibetan Buddhist tradition also refers to the manner in which they came to be known as Śākyas: "King Virūḍhaka thought one day of his comely sons, so he asked his courtiers what had become of them; then they told him their adventures. 'The daring young men! The daring young men', he exclaimed; and from this they became known as 'Śākyas'."<sup>6</sup> Both the Tibetan tradition and that of Bharata derive their information from the *Dīgha Nikāya* account.

The connection of the Sakyas with the oak tree is patently false as no oaks grow in the Terāī. The Tibetan tradition which explains away the name of the clan in which their great teacher was born by emphasizing the courage of the ancestors of the Sakyas appears to be too flattering and artificial to be true.<sup>7</sup> No other scholar has attempted the etymology save B.C. Law, in the cursory remark quoted. At the present stage of our knowledge we are unable to

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Monier Williams, *Skt. -Eng. Dic.*, s.v. *śāka*; *Pāli-Eng. Dic.*, s.v. *sāka*.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, s.v. *śaktā*.

<sup>3</sup> *Majjhima*, i, pp. 415, 514; *Sutta*, p. 143; cf. *Pāli-Eng. Dic.* s.v.

<sup>4</sup> Law, *SCBI*, p. 187.

<sup>5</sup> *Sum. Vil.*, i, p. 258; *Par. Jot.*, i, p. 352.

<sup>6</sup> Rockhill, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

<sup>7</sup> Likewise the attempts to connect them with the Śakas are futile. *Śakā abhijano' sya*; cf. Monier Williams, *Skt. -Eng. Dic.*, s.v. *Śākya*.



suggest a more satisfactory and convincing etymology of the name than to connect it with the Sanskrit root *śak*.<sup>1</sup>

### *Geographical Location*

We have seen that the Sakyas were not legally subordinate to the Kosalan king during the reign of Pasenadi and the earlier part of his successor's reign, and that they had an assembly which administered the Sakyan territory. Their geographical location is also significant if we are to understand the workings of the Sakyan republican institutions within the background of neighbouring states. The general position of their country is intimated by the distances given from other places; 60 *yojanas* (450 miles) from Rājagaha, 50 *yojanas* (375 miles) from Vesālī, 6 or 7 *yojanas* (50 or 60 miles) from Sāvattthi.<sup>2</sup> Rhys Davids suggested that the Sakyan territory must have been just on the border of Nepal and India. The location was finally settled by the discoveries of the *stūpa* or burial-mound put up by the Sakyas over the portion of the relics they retained from the Buddha's funeral pyre,<sup>3</sup> and of Aśoka's inscription, *in situ*, recording his visit to the Lumbini garden in which the Buddha was born.<sup>4</sup> Most of the scholars now doubt that the Piprāh-wā casket inscription refers to the Sakyas. In fact it only mentions the Buddha, the Lord of the Sakyas (*bhagavate Sakiyānam*).<sup>5</sup> The Aśoka-column, however, proves that some 300 years after the Buddha's birth this was believed to have been the site of his birthplace.

Cunningham, however, in identifying Kapilavatthu, believed that the position of the city could be fixed within very narrow limits by many concurring data. "According to the Buddhist chronicles of Tibet, Kapilavastu or Kapilanagara was founded by some descendants of the solar hero Gotama,<sup>6</sup> on the bank of a lake near the river Rohiṇī in Kosala. Now the town of Nagar, or Nagar-Khās, that is 'the city', is situated on the eastern bank of the Chando Tāl, near a large stream named Kohāna, a tributary of the Rāpti, and in the

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Oldenberg, *Buddha*, p. 95.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Rhys Davids, *Ancient Coins and Measures of Ceylon*, p. 160; *Buddhist India*, p. 17 fn. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Rhys Davids, *Buddhist India*, p. 17.

<sup>4</sup> Smith, *JRAS*, 1897, p. 618; *JRAS*, 1898, p. 588.

<sup>5</sup> Sircar, *Select Inscriptions*, pp. 84, 85, fns. 6, 7, respectively.

<sup>6</sup> *JASB*, ii, p. 391.



northern division of Oudh beyond the Ghāgra river, and therefore in Kosala. To the west a small stream named Sidh falls into the lake.”<sup>1</sup> Cunningham further suggests that Sidh (equivalent to Sanskrit *Siddha*) might refer to Kapila, whose hermitage was also on the bank of the lake opposite the city. Then he discusses the position of the river Rohiṇī which separated the Sakyan territory from that of the Koliyas, whose territory lay to the east of this river. Cunningham tentatively identifies the Koliyan capital Rāmagāma with the “village of Am Kohil, which is exactly 11 miles to the east of Nagar, and rather less than 3 miles from the nearest point of the Kohāna river,” which he identifies with the ancient river Rohiṇī.<sup>2</sup>

Cunningham’s identifications do not contradict the Buddhist sources, but the Aśokan inscription at Lumbini seems to be decisive. Yet these identifications do not help us to determine the actual size and boundaries of the Sakyan territory. For this purpose our chief source of information is the Buddhist stories; hence we only tentatively suggest its geographical situation and boundaries.

The *Kuṇāla Jātaka* informs us that “the Sākiya and the Koliya tribes had the river Rohiṇī, which flows between the cities of Kapilavatthu and Koliya, confined by a single dam and by means of it cultivated their crops”.<sup>3</sup> This river has been identified with the modern river Kohāna by Cunningham.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the river Rohiṇī formed the eastern boundary of the Sakyan territory; beyond it, probably somewhat to the south, was the land of the Koliyas. It is probable that the Koliyan territory did not stretch as far north as did the Sakyan. On the north-east the Sakyas would border the territory of the Mallas of Kusinārā; and the Moriyas would be to the east of the Koliyas.<sup>5</sup> To the south and west of the Sakyan territory lay the kingdom of Kosala, for in the *Majjhima Nikāya* King Pasenadi comes from Nangaraka, a Kosalan town, to Medatallūpa, one of the Sakyan townships, without transversing any intervening territory of another people.<sup>6</sup> But a much more important statement, in the *Bhaddasāla Jātaka*, clearly demarcates the boun-

<sup>1</sup> *CAGIM*, pp. 475-76.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 476-77.

<sup>3</sup> *Jāt.*, v, p. 412.

<sup>4</sup> *CAGIM.*, see his map xi, pp. 444-45.

<sup>5</sup> See our map A.

<sup>6</sup> *Majjhima*, ii, p. 118; cf. our map A.



daries of Kosala during the earlier part of Viḍūḍabha's reign. The Buddha had been intervening between the Sakyas and Viḍūḍabha, who was marching with his army towards the Sakyan capital. The Buddha reached "a spot near Kapilavatthu, and sat beneath a tree that gave scanty shade. Hard by that place, a huge and shady banyan tree stood on the boundary of Viḍūḍabha's realms."<sup>1</sup> This passage not only indicates the limits of the two territories, but also shows that the Sakyan territory was either to the west or to the south of Sāvatti. It is likely that the boundary of the Sakyas to the west was not very extensive, as the Buddha chose a spot in the Sakyan land "near Kapilavatthu."<sup>2</sup> Another significant fact is that the shady banyan tree "stood on the boundary of Viḍūḍabha's realms," indicating the boundary between the Kosalan and the Sakyan territories. The passage would also suggest that the Sakyan land reached further to the north of Kapilavatthu than to the west or south. References to the great forest and hills, in connection with the Sakyan capital, suggest that their territory stretched right into the Himālayas and that there was a forest north of it.<sup>3</sup> In short, we may say that the Sakyan territory lay along the foothills of the Himālayas; to the west and south lay the kingdom of Kosala,<sup>4</sup> and to the east the land of the Koliyas of Rāmagāma. The river Rohiṇī divided the land of the two republican peoples. In Rhys Davids' opinion, "it was no doubt in this plain, stretching about fifty miles from east to west, and thirty or forty miles to the southward from the foot of Himālaya Hills, that the majority of the [Sakyan] clan were resident."<sup>5</sup>

### *Government and Organization*

That the administration of the Sakyan republic was in the hands of an assembly or Sakya-*gaṇa* with a chosen single head, is evident from a number of references to their conducting public business in their *santhāgāra*.<sup>6</sup> In the *Dīgha Nikāya* there is a dialogue between

<sup>1</sup> *Jāt.*, iv, p. 152.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Rockhill, *op. cit.*, p. 116; cp. Schiefner, *Tib. Lebens*, p. 288.

<sup>3</sup> *Dīgha*, iii, p. 117; *Majjhima*, i, pp. 91, 353; ii, pp. 109, 199, 253; *Jāt.*, v, pp. 415ff; Rockhill, *op. cit.*, p. 117, etc.; cf. Oldenberg, *Buddha*, p. 415.

<sup>4</sup> Oldenberg, *Buddha*, p. 98.

<sup>5</sup> Rhys Davids, *Buddhist India*, p. 20; cf. Rao, *op. cit.*, p. 279; cf. Oldenberg, *Buddha*, pp. 95-6 and fns.

<sup>6</sup> *Dīgha*, i, p. 91; *Lalitavistara*, p. 115; *Jāt.*, iv, p. 145; Rockhill, *op. cit.*, 119, etc.



a Brāhmaṇa named Ambaṭṭha and the Buddha. The subject of this *Sutta* is the conduct and behaviour of the Sakyas. "Once Gotama," says Ambaṭṭha, "I had to go to Kapilavatthu on some business or other of Pokkharasādi's, and went into the Sakyas' Congress-Hall. Now at that time there were a number of Sakyas, old and young, seated in the hall on grand seats, making merry and joking together, nudging one another with their fingers; and for a truth, methinks, it was I myself that was the subject of their jokes; and not one of them even offered me a seat." <sup>1</sup> The *Bhaddasāla Jātaka*, as we have noted above, informs us that King Pasenadi's proposal of marriage with a Sakya girl was discussed in the assembly of the Sakyas.<sup>2</sup> The *Kuṇāla Jātaka* speaks of Sakyan *bhojakās*,<sup>3</sup> "headmen," literally "enjoyers"—probably of rights on land or as landholders. The *bhojakās* might have been those Sakyans who took an active part in colonizing the area and hence had a right to the land like the barons of mediaeval Europe. We also hear of *amaccās* or councillors, and *uparājās* or viceroys<sup>4</sup> who, along with serfs, labourers and attendants, sallied forth to fight against the Koliyas.<sup>5</sup>

All the passages quoted above indicate that the Sakyas had an assembly which probably consisted of the heads of families<sup>6</sup> of Kṣatriyas of the Gautama *gotra*. Some scholars have taken the statement of the *Dīgha Nikāya*, that "in the Śākya Parliament both young and old assembled," without any serious consideration.<sup>7</sup> No doubt the text puts these words in the mouth of the Brāhmaṇa Ambaṭṭha, but this refers to a gathering of the Sakyas in its social aspect. However, the session of the assembly which discussed King Pasenadi's proposal was political in implication. In fact, the *san-thāgāra* was the general centre of the republic where, apart from political and public business, social and religious functions were also conducted.<sup>8</sup> It appears that the *uparājās* were the eldest sons of the Sakyan *rājās* of the assembly and were expected to take their places upon the death of their fathers, but we have no positive

<sup>1</sup> *Dīgha*, i, p. 91.

<sup>2</sup> *Jāt.*, iv, p. 145; Rockhill, *op. cit.*, pp. 77-8; *cf.* above, pp. 186ff.

<sup>3</sup> *Jāt.*, v, pp. 412-3; *cf.* Majumdar, *Corporate Life*, pp. 135ff.

<sup>4</sup> *Cf.* below, pp. 202ff.

<sup>5</sup> *Jāt.*, v, pp. 412-16.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, iv, p. 158.

<sup>7</sup> Jayaswal, *Hindu Polity*, pp. 98-9; Rhys Davids, *Buddhist India*, p. 19; *CHI*, i, p. 176; Law, *TAI*, p. 258.

<sup>8</sup> *Cf.* Vedic *sabhā*, pp. 32ff.



evidence as to their being real members of the assembly in their own right. We have considered the question of the 7,707 Licchavi *uparājās*,<sup>1</sup> and we believe that the case with the Sakyan *uparājās* was no different.

We are not certain of the exact number of the Sakyan general assembly, but from Buddhaghosa's statement that there were 80,000 families in the clan of the Buddha<sup>2</sup> it would appear fairly large. Jayaswal suggests that the Sakyan council was composed of 500 members.<sup>3</sup> However, he gives no authority to support this claim, but appears to base it on the *Lalitavistara*.<sup>4</sup> From the context it is obvious that he made this statement without serious thought, as the following statement of his, based on Rockhill, reads: "The Śākyas are said to have had a law that each citizen could have only one wife".<sup>5</sup>

However, B.C. Law brings forth some evidence in support of Jayaswal's suggestion of 500 members constituting the assembly of the Sakyas. Law says that "the 'saṃthāgāra' is spoken of in the *Mahāvastu* and the *Lalitavistara*, and we are told there that 500 Śākyas usually took their seats in the Hall. The *Mahāvastu* describes how thirty-two princes, the sons of a Śākya girl and Rājā Kola of Benares, came to settle in Kapilavastu, and presented themselves before the Śākya council (Śākya-pariṣad), where 500 Śākya leaders sat together to transact some important business . . . The *Lalitavistara*<sup>6</sup> also gives 500 as the members of the Śākya council."<sup>7</sup>

These references are quite significant in themselves, but this round number of 500 is so common in the Buddhist literature that not much credence can be placed upon it. We can be sure only of the existence of an assembly of the heads of Sakyan families,<sup>8</sup> but we cannot determine the exact number of the body.

The Pāli sources are not only silent about the exact number of the Sakyan assembly, but also not definite about the existence of

<sup>1</sup> Cf. above, pp. 104ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Sum. Vil.*, ii, pp. 283-4; *asīti Kula Sahassāni* on *Dīgha*, i, p. 115; cf. *CHI*, i, pp. 175-6; tr., i, p. 157 fn. *Dialogues*.

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 43.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44 fn. 11.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43; Rockhill, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

<sup>6</sup> *Lalitavistara*, pp. 136-7.

<sup>7</sup> Law, *TAI*, p. 254.

<sup>8</sup> *Jāt.*, v, p. 413.

a smaller council. It is very likely that they had such a council, as the *Kuṇāla Jātaka* refers to Sakyan *amaccās* or councillors, along with *bhojakās* and *uparājās*.<sup>1</sup> The order of these three words seems significant. The councillors occur after the *bhojakās*, or landholders, and before the *uparājās*. As the *Jātakas* always refer to institutions in monarchical terminology, it is probable that the councillors are the college of rulers of the republic, whereas the viceroys are only the prospective members of the political assembly. Thus, it seems likely that these *amaccās* are really the smaller council of the Sakyas which executed public business. The republics neighbouring on the Sakyas had councils, and it would be almost impossible to carry out the administration through a single elected chief without the aid of a council. The whole assembly would have been unmanageable without the existence of some inner council. No doubt the chief had such a council, chosen from within the assembly, but no definite evidence of its existence and composition can be found, save for the mere mention of the *amaccās* in the *Kuṇāla Jātaka*.

We know that the Sakyan assembly gathered together to discuss important matters of public business. It was this body which decided upon questions of war, peace, and alliances. They deliberated on Pasenadi's proposal,<sup>2</sup> and decided on action in reference to their feud with the Koliyas.<sup>3</sup> It was they who received Viḍūḍabha when he went to pay a visit to his maternal uncles,<sup>4</sup> and who finally discussed plans and policy at the eve of Viḍūḍabha's siege of Kapilavatthu.<sup>5</sup> In Rhys David's opinion, the assembly "must inevitably have had a financial policy to discuss and carry out"<sup>6</sup> as well. We do not know how often this body convened. The smaller council, headed by the chief or president of the republic, probably met more often than the assembly, and carried out the business of the republic in the name of the latter.

The administrative business of the republic and the more important judicial acts were carried out in the public assembly.<sup>7</sup> All the meetings were held in the *santhāgāra*, "a technical term never

<sup>1</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>2</sup> *Jāt.*, iv, p. 145.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, v, p. 413.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, iv, p. 147.

<sup>5</sup> Rockhill, *op. cit.*, pp. 77-8, 119.

<sup>6</sup> *CHI*, i, p. 199.

<sup>7</sup> *Lalitavistara*, pp. 146-7; Rockhill, *op. cit.*, p. 119.



used for the council chamber of kings".<sup>1</sup> The main Sakyan *santhā-gāra* was at Kapilavatthu, and the *Majjhima Nikāya* attests to the existence of a similar hall at Cātuma.<sup>2</sup> From the existence of such assembly-halls at Vesāli, Pāvā, Kusinārā, Kapilavatthu and Cātuma it appears that all the republics had one at their capital towns, and no doubt the more important settlements also had their own assembly-halls.

We have no account of the manner in which the proceedings were conducted in the Sakyan assembly-hall, but in the *Mahāgovinda Suttanta* there is an account of a session held in Sakka's heaven,<sup>3</sup> evidently modelled more or less on the proceedings in a republican assembly.<sup>4</sup> The writer of the *Suttanta* puts the account of the proceedings of heaven into the mouth of Pañcasikho Gandhabbo, who reported them to the Buddha. He says:

In days gone by... on the 15th, [*posathe*], at the Feast of the Invitations [*Pavāraṇā*] on the night of full moon, all the gods in the heaven of the Thirty-Three were assembled [*devā tāvatīṃsā sudhammā yaṃ sabbāyaṃ sannisinna honti*] sitting in their Hall of Good Council. And a vast celestial company [*mahatīca dibbapārisā*] was seated round about, and at the four quarters [*catuddisā*] sat the four Great Kings [*cattāro ca mahārājāno*]. King of the East, seating facing the West, King of the South... facing the north, ... of the West... of the North.<sup>5</sup> When... all the gods... are assembled, and seated in their Hall of Good Council..., and with the four Great Kings at four quarters..., after that come our seats. And those gods... who had been recently reborn in the hosts of the Thirty-Tree... outshine the other gods in appearance and in glory [*te aññe deve atirocanti aññena ceva yasasā ca*].... Then Sakka... ruler of the gods, when he saw the satisfaction felt by the Thirty-Three gods expressed his approval in these verses. The Three and Thirty, verily, both gods and lords, rejoice... Come hither; and in glory all the other gods outshine....<sup>6</sup> Hereat... the Thirty-Three gods were even more... glad and of good cheer.... Then Sakka, ... perceiving the satisfaction of the Thirty-Three gods, addressed them thus: 'Is it your wish,

<sup>1</sup> Tr., *Dialogues*, i, p. 113 fn. 2; cf. R. O. Franke, *JPTS*, 1909, p. 65; *CHI*, i, p. 176.

<sup>2</sup> *Majjhima*, i, p. 457.

<sup>3</sup> *Dīgha* (Nālanda text), ii, pp. 165-69.

<sup>4</sup> Though this passage is not definitely applicable to the Sakyas, this is a convenient place to discuss the question of procedure.

<sup>5</sup> *Dīgha*, ii, p. 165.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 165-6.



gentlemen, to hear eight truthful items in praise of that Exalted One?' 'It is our wish, sir, to hear them.' Then Sakka . . . uttered before the Thirty-Three gods these eight . . . .<sup>1</sup> Then . . . the Three and Thirty gods having thus deliberated and taken council together concerning the matter for which they were assembled and seated in the Hall . . . , with respect to that matter the Four Kings were receivers of the spoken word, . . . were receivers of the admonition given, remaining the while in their places, not retiring.<sup>2</sup> Taking the uttered word and speech, the Kings stood there, serene and calm, each in his place . . . .<sup>3</sup> Then the Thirty-Three gods came again, compared notes of the four Great Kings who are agreed in this case.<sup>4</sup>

These proceedings seem to be a heavenly counterpart of the procedure followed in the republican assembly, and the actions of the gods appear to have been depicted in imitation of those of men. The members of the assembly gather in the *santhāgāra*; four of the councillors are posted in four different corners or sides of the hall to hear distinctly and conveniently the speeches made by the members or *rājās*. The president or chief takes his appointed seat and when the house is ready he puts forward the matter to be discussed. Members express their views, which are probably committed to memory by the four councillors. Then all adjourn, leaving the recorders to compare their notes.<sup>5</sup> All the councillors come back and wait for the decision of the recorders.<sup>6</sup>

The procedure is simple and it is most likely that it was followed in actual practice. The account of the text, however, seems to us to be applicable rather to the procedure of meeting followed at the trial of judicial cases than to the deliberations of the general assembly, which had no distinct legislative functions as such. We may be sure that the originators and repeaters of this story were themselves members of the republics and would have made use of their knowledge of what was constantly done at the gatherings in the assembly-hall.

Rhys Davids, on the authority of the *Vinaya Piṭaka*,<sup>7</sup> held that no cases or motions were decided by casting votes. "The decision is

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 166ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 168.

<sup>3</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 169.

<sup>5</sup> This indicates that they were illiterate.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. tr. *Dialogues*, ii, p. 263 fn.

<sup>7</sup> *Vinaya*, iii, pp. 40ff.



regarded as unanimous; or, if difference of opinion is manifest, then the matter is referred for arbitration (*ubbhāhikā*) to a council of referees.”<sup>1</sup> He concludes that the “method of procedure generally adopted in the mote-halls was not, as in modern parliaments, by voting on a motion.”<sup>2</sup> However, Jayaswal in discussing the procedure<sup>3</sup> mainly relies on the Tibetan tradition,<sup>4</sup> which he admits is the sole “direct reference to the technical aspect of these deliberations.” Jayaswal considers this of the “highest importance” for it puts him on the “right track”. From this he concludes that in the Sakyan assembly issues were decided by the vote of a majority.

The Tibetan tradition made available by Rockhill informs us that the Kosalan King Viḍūḍabha, after besieging the Sakyan capital, sent his messenger to the Sakyas saying, “It is all over; so open your gates quickly”. Then the Śākyas replied, “Let us all assemble and deliberate whether we shall open the gates”. When they had assembled, some said, “As there are various opinions, we will find out the opinion of the majority”. So they set about voting on the subject.<sup>5</sup>

We have just quoted the opposing views of Rhys Davids and Jayaswal with regard to the Sakyan procedure. The former expounded his theory on the basis of his study and examination of the Buddhist Vinaya texts, while Jayaswal mainly relied on the slender and late evidence of Rockhill’s translation of the Tibetan tradition.<sup>6</sup> Altekar partly follows the line of Jayaswal, relying in the case of the Sakyas on the same authority. He concludes that “in the case of difference of opinion votes were taken and the majority view prevailed. This procedure, being the obvious and natural one, must have been followed everywhere.”<sup>7</sup> But he also takes into consideration the evidence provided by an earlier Buddhist text with regard to the use of voting. “In the Buddhist Saṃgha the voting was sometimes done by secret method (*gūḷhaka*), some-

<sup>1</sup> Rhys Davids, in *CHI*, i, p. 176, based on *Vinaya*, iii, pp. 49ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 176-7.

<sup>3</sup> Jayaswal, *Hindu Polity*, p. 86.

<sup>4</sup> Rockhill, *op. cit.*, pp. 118-9.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

<sup>6</sup> We have consulted Dr. Snellgrove who is at present unable to trace the original passage in Tibetan, but gives his approval to the correctness of Rockhill’s translation.

<sup>7</sup> Altekar, *State and Government*, pp. 131-2, based on Rockhill, *op. cit.*, pp. 118-9.

times by whispering method (*sakarnajanakam*), and sometimes by the open method (*vivatakam*)."<sup>1</sup>

In our opinion Rhys Davids' suggestion that votes were never taken in the deliberations of the Buddhist republics seems rather timid, though it may well apply to the Vedic assemblies.<sup>2</sup> As regards Jayaswal's theory of "deliberation in Hindu republics," we find it historically false. No early text refers to the Sakyas as deliberating and deciding the issue by a vote of the majority. The whole story is a late one, and though it may contain historical recollections, it is hardly sufficient as a basis for the view that majority voting was a regular feature of the procedure. We concede to Jayaswal's view that the Sakyas deliberated on important matters, like any other republic of the time, and probably also had a simple voting system either by raising hands or by the use of wooden chips. But there is no evidence for a much more elaborate system of deliberation. The truth probably lies somewhere between what Rhys Davids suggested and a simpler procedure than that gleaned from the *Cūllavagga*. It could hardly be, we might add, the detailed picture presented by Altekar.<sup>3</sup>

### *Political History*

There is not a single mention of the Sakyas in the entire pre-Buddhist Brāhmaṇic literature. But in the Pāli texts frequent mentions of king Okkāka (Ikṣvāku) are found in association with the Sakyas.<sup>4</sup> This may suggest the latter's connection with the Kuru-Pāñcāla dynasty of the Ikṣvākus and indicate that the Sakyas, like the Videhas, the Licchavis, the Mallas and others, had moved eastwards from the western region of north India. The study of the Brāhmaṇic literature and the knowledge gained from the Buddhist texts about the Kosalans on the one hand, and the Videhas and Licchavis and their geographical locations on the other, tend to suggest that the Sakyas had, during the 7th century B.C. or a little earlier, taken possession of a tract of land along the Himālayan foothills occupied by the Kosalans and bordering on the Videhan territory. During the lifetime of the Buddha, the Sakyas,

<sup>1</sup> *Cūllavagga*, iv, 14, 24; cf. Altekar, *State and Government*, loc. cit.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. above, pp. 19ff.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. above, pp. 116ff.

<sup>4</sup> *Dīgha*, i, pp. 87ff; *Jāt.*, ii, p. 299; v, pp. 141-2, 145-7, 160, etc.; cf. Jayaswal, *Hindu Polity*, pp. 177-8.



along with the Koliyas, the Moriyas and the Mallas, separated the Kosalan territory from that of the Videhas and the Licchavis. This would suggest that these republics expanded at the cost of the Kosalan kingdom.<sup>1</sup>

The *Kuṇāla Jātaka* informs us of a quarrel about the waters of the river Rohiṇī, which both the Sakyas and the Koliyas needed for the irrigation of their crops.<sup>2</sup> "But other teachers tell the story thus," continues the same text. "When the female slaves of the Sākiyas and the Koliyas came to the river to fetch water, and throwing the coils of cloth that they carried on their heads upon the ground, were seated and pleasantly conversing, a certain woman took another's cloth, thinking it was her own; and then owing to this a quarrel arose, each claiming the coil of the cloth as hers. Gradually, the people of the two cities, the serfs and the labourers, the attendants, landholders or headmen, councillors and viceroys, all of them sallied forth ready for battle."<sup>3</sup> The *Jātaka* preamble concludes: "But the former version found in many commentaries and being plausible is to be accepted rather than the other".<sup>4</sup> We agree with the *Jātaka* writer as the quarrel over the coil of cloth seems too petty a reason for a serious feud like this. The quarrel was, however, mitigated by the appearance of the Buddha on the scene.

According to the tradition, after the seizure of the throne of Kosala by Viḍūḍabha, his father Pasenadi died. It is said that Viḍūḍabha was on bad terms with the Sakyas because they had given his father to wife a slave girl who was the mother of Viḍūḍabha.<sup>5</sup> According to this story, the destruction of the Sakyas was his first aim. He advanced towards Kapilavatthu with his army three times, but thrice he returned out of regard for the Buddha. But the fourth time he went ahead with his attack because the Buddha did not intervene. "The king Viḍūḍabha slew all the Sakyas, beginning with babes at the breast, and with their hearts' blood did he wash the bench [on which he had sat in the Sakyan assembly] and returned."<sup>6</sup> This is just the sort of legend that would be concocted

<sup>1</sup> Cf. our map. A

<sup>2</sup> *Jāt.*, v, pp. 412-13.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 413; also alluded to in *Jāt.*, i, p. 208—one of the *Jātakas* narrated at the time of the feud.

<sup>4</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>5</sup> *Jāt.*, iv, pp. 144ff; Rockhill, *op. cit.*, pp. 117ff.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.



in order to bring scorn on the wicked Viḍūḍabha. Moreover, these are the sort of details which would be invented to fit the moral. In our opinion, the only reliable fact is that Viḍūḍabha conquered and absorbed the Sakyas. In view of the fact that the Sakyas claimed a share of the Buddha's relics it seems likely that this took place some time after the *Parinirvāṇa*. It appears, however, that the story developed among people with considerable knowledge of the district, since it contains several circumstantial topographical details, and we have therefore made use of it for establishing the Sakyan boundaries.

The Tibetan version of the scene of this battle is depicted more dramatically.<sup>1</sup> It says:

As soon as the Śākyas of Kapila heard that Virūḍhaka had come with all his troops to destroy them they got together their army, sallied forth and repulsed him . . . . After repelling Virūḍhaka's army, the Śākyas re-entered the city, shut their gates, and remained watching on their walls, sounding their trumpets the while . . . . The Śākyas issued a proclamation prohibiting anyone from attacking Virūḍhaka or his army . . . There happened to be a Śākya called Shampaka who was off working for himself on the hills, and who had not heard the proclamation . . . . Filled with rage on hearing of Virūḍhaka's attack, he sallied forth towards Virūḍhaka's army, and overthrew a great number of persons, the greater part of whom he killed outright. Virūḍhaka, greatly discouraged, said to Ambarisha, 'Are these your righteous people who will not kill even a beetle? If they all kill as many of us as this one man, there will not be left a soul living among us.'<sup>2</sup>

The same source further informs us that they took resort in "fermenting dissensions among the inhabitants". After consulting together at the receipt of Virūḍhaka-Viḍūḍabha's message, the Sakyan assembly followed their headman (*rgan-po*) and advocated opening of the gates. Hardly were the gates opened than the Kosalan army broke in upon them and started the extermination of the Sakyas. "Seeing this [accomplished], Virūḍhaka thought, 'Now I may depart, for I have fulfilled my promise.' He had massacred in this way the greater part of believers."<sup>3</sup>

These are the two versions of the story which describe the elimination of the Sakyas at the hands of Viḍūḍabha-Virūḍhaka, the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Rockhill, *op. cit.*, pp. 112ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 117-8.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 119-20.



king of Kosala. We are inclined to ignore in the Pāli version the account of the Buddha in protecting his people because it may simply have been a gratifying tribute to the Master, over-emphasizing his influence on the political events of the time. Similarly we would ignore the dramatic effects worked-up by the Tibetan writers. From the crux of the two stories the simple fact emerges clearly that Viḍūḍabha invaded the land of the Sakyas for reasons not very different from those of his contemporary Ajātasattu's invasion of the Vajjis.<sup>1</sup> Probably by attacking the Sakyas Viḍūḍabha wanted to gain possession of the land which had formerly been a part of the Kosalan kingdom. There was strong opposition from the side of the sturdy Sakyas, like that of the Vajjians against Ajātasattu, and there was severe fighting and great loss of life on both sides. The three returns of the invading army of Viḍūḍabha's on the intervention of the Buddha may suggest the long duration of the war. The Tibetan version does not exclude the role of diplomacy and the fermenting of dissension among the Sakyans. Consequently they were badly crushed with great losses sustained on both sides. We may further conjecture that because of these losses Ajātasattu took the opportunity to invade Kosalan territory soon after the war was over. Perhaps that is why we do not hear of Viḍūḍabha or his successors, if he had any, after his war with the Sakyas. When the curtain rises again, Kosala has been absorbed into Magadha.<sup>2</sup>

The Tibetan version enlarges the story after the war,<sup>3</sup> and there we are told that some of the Sakyas escaped to Nepal and some to Rājagaha, while others were captured by Viḍūḍabha and put to the sword. The story ends with the death of Viḍūḍabha and his minister, as the Buddha had forcast. This simply shows that some of the Sakyas escaped, although the sources are not reliable as to exactly where they went, while others were put to death. The death of Viḍūḍabha is also suggestive of a new factor in the downfall of the Kosala kingdom.

We do not, of course, subscribe to the miraculous death of Viḍūḍabha as described in the sources. Neither may the *argumentum ex silentio* necessarily be applicable to the fact that no allusion to Ajātasattu's attack is made. On the one hand we hear nothing of

<sup>1</sup> Rhys Davids, *Buddhist India*, pp. 11-12; cf. Basham, *Proc. Ind. Hist. Cong.*, 1951, p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> *CHI*, i, p. 182.

<sup>3</sup> Rockhill, *op. cit.*, pp. 121ff.

Viḍūḍabha or his successors from the early Pāli texts, while on the other the late Tibetan tradition records his miraculous death with his minister soon after they had annihilated the Sakyas. We are inclined to suggest that what the Tibetan tradition alludes to is the historical fact of Viḍūḍabha's death at the hands of Ajātasattu, who probably attacked the greatly weakened Kosalan king after the Kosalan-Sakyan war. It was the Magadhan king who dealt the deathblow to the Kosalan kingdom and consequently incorporated it into the expanding Magadhan empire.

(After its defeat by Viḍūḍabha, the Sakyan republic disappeared forever.) However, we believe the final blow was not dealt by Viḍūḍabha during the lifetime of the Buddha; if so, how could the Sakyans claim their share of the relics at Kusinārā? (We are inclined to think that, despite the Tibetan tradition, the end of the Sakyas did not come until after the Buddha had passed away.)

The Sakyas never regained political importance after the war and that is probably why we do not find them mentioned by Pāṇini or Kauṭilya. Some Sakyan families and individuals may well have survived, but we no longer hear of these children of the mountains who tended to cling to the hills and, like mountaineers the world over, were generally distinguished by a sturdy independence, both in politics and in religion. But a late Buddhist tradition informs us that some of the Sakyas escaped from Kapilavatthu, established a settlement there, and became known in history as the Moriyas of Pipphalivana.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. below, pp. 219ff.



## CHAPTER NINE

### THE KOLIYAS

#### *Name and Etymology*

The standard Pāli form of this people's name is Koliyas.<sup>1</sup> A variant spelling is Koliya.<sup>2</sup> Similar to the Mallas,<sup>3</sup> there is virtual uniformity about the spelling of their name. It was believed to refer to their origin either from the *kola* tree or from the sage named Kola. The *Kuṇāla Jātaka* refers to the Koliyas in the words of the Sakyas as the "destitute and ill-conditioned fellows, who like brute beasts had their dwelling in a hollow jujube tree."<sup>4</sup> Here the Sakyas meant merely to insult their opponents by calling them derogatory names during their dispute over the waters of the river Rohiṇī. Malalasekera only reports this and makes no comment regarding the derivation of the word Koliya.<sup>5</sup> Law also refers to this evidence but he does not attempt the etymology.<sup>6</sup> So far as we know, no scholar except Law has given a general account of the Koliyas, and no historian of the Buddhist republics, ancient or modern, has suggested an etymology save that referred to in the preamble of the *Jātaka*.

Significantly, however, most of the sources connect their name with the *Kola* (masculine) or *Kolā*, *kolī* (feminine), meaning the jujube tree. The word *kola* occurs in this sense independently in the *Majjhima Nikāya*<sup>7</sup> and the *Sujāta Jātaka*.<sup>8</sup> All the Sanskrit Pāli, and Ardhamāgadhī dictionaries give this word (*kroḍa*), the same meaning, "jujube tree," or Hindi *ber*.<sup>9</sup> The *Sujāta Jātaka*<sup>10</sup> makes it clear that the jujube fruit (*kolaphala*) was red in hue and

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<sup>1</sup> *Dīgha*, ii, pp. 165-7; *Anguttara*, ii, p. 558; *Sum. Vil.*, i, pp. 260-62; *Jāt.*, i, pp. 407-8; v, pp. 412-15, etc.

<sup>2</sup> *Majjhima*, i, p. 387.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. above, pp. 171ff.

<sup>4</sup> *Jāt.*, v, p. 413.

<sup>5</sup> *DPPN*, i, pp. 689-90.

<sup>6</sup> Law, *KCBI*, p. 203; *SKTAI*, pp. 207ff; *TAI*, pp. 290-92; Majumdar, *et. al.*, *HCIP*, ii, pp. 16-7.

<sup>7</sup> *Majjhima*, i, p. 80.

<sup>8</sup> *Jāt.*, iii, pp. 21-2.

<sup>9</sup> Monier Williams, *Skt. -Eng. Dic.*, s.v. *kroḍa*; *Pāli-Eng. Dic.*, s.v. *kola*.

<sup>10</sup> *Jāt.*, iii, pp. 21-2.

as large as an egg,<sup>1</sup> thus distinguishing it from another variety of the jujube fruit which comes from thorny bushes and is much smaller than the fruit of the Pāli texts. Both kinds are found in India today and both are called *ber*.

The allusion of the *Jātaka* to the Koliyas once dwelling in a hollow jujube tree<sup>2</sup> cannot be accepted. But the unanimity of almost all the Pāli sources in relating them to the *kola* tree is strong evidence and cannot be dismissed. As there is no contradictory information, the emphasis on the relation of the Koliyas with the *kola* is great, and probably decisive. We suggest that the Koliyas dwelt in a region where *kola* trees grew in abundance, and this was the fact which impelled the Sakyas to call them dwellers in the hollow of *kolas*. Koliya may be a tribal name of totemic character, like the name of the Licchavis, which, if our suggestion is correct, is connected with *ṛkṣa*, "bear".<sup>3</sup>

### *Origin and Early History*

The Koliyas, unlike the Videhas—but like the Sakyas, Mallas, Licchavis, etc. do not figure in the Brāhmaṇical literature under this name. Possibly they were known by some other name during the pre-Buddhist period,<sup>4</sup> but we have no specific statement to this effect. Further, unlike the Licchavis and the Mallas, but like the Nāyas and Sakyas, the Koliyas did not receive even a mere mention at the hands of secular writers such as Pāṇini and Kauṭilya. Neither the *Vārtikākāra* Kātyāyana nor the *Bhāṣyakāra* Patañjali alludes to these people. The Jainas also appear to have neglected them. Thus, the only known source for the reconstruction of the Koliyan political history and for the understanding of their system of government is the literature of the Buddhists.

The Koliyas lived under a republican form of government at the time when their neighbour, the Śākyamuni Gotama, preached his doctrine of the Middle Path.<sup>5</sup> The centre of their power was at Rāmāgāma,<sup>6</sup> and according to some sources Devadaha also was one of

<sup>1</sup> However, it should be noted that the fruit is at first green then turns yellowish gold, and is finally red.

<sup>2</sup> *Jāt.*, v, p. 413.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. above, pp. 87ff.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Oldenberg, *Buddha*, pp. 401ff.

<sup>5</sup> *Dīgha*, ii, pp. 165-7; *Jāt.*, v, pp. 412-16; cf. *DPPN*, i, pp. 689-90; Rhys Davids, *Buddhist India*, p. 22, etc.

<sup>6</sup> *Dīgha*, ii, pp. 165ff.



the Koliyan centres.<sup>1</sup> The *Āṅuttara Nikāya*,<sup>2</sup> the *Mahāvastu*,<sup>3</sup> the *Apadāna*,<sup>4</sup> and Buddhaghosa's commentary<sup>5</sup> contain what appears to be a legendary account of the origin of the Koliyas.

We are told<sup>6</sup> that a king of Banaras, named Rāma, suffered from leprosy, and, being detested by the women of his court, entrusted the kingdom to his eldest son, and himself retired into the forest. There, living on woodland leaves and fruits, he soon recovered, and while wandering about, came across Piyā, the eldest of the five daughters of king Okkāka.<sup>7</sup> She herself was afflicted with leprosy. Rāma cured her and married her. In due course they begot sixteen pairs of sons. With the help of the king of Banaras, they built a town in the forest, removing a big Kola tree in doing so. The city there upon came to be called Kolanagara, and because the site was discovered on a "tigertrack", Vyagghapatha, it was also called Vyagghapajjā. The descendants of the king were known as the Koliyas.

The *Mahāvastu* version<sup>8</sup> varies from the above account. It reports that the daughter of a Sakyan noble was attacked by leprosy and physicians tried in vain to cure her; sores appeared all over her body, and people began to hate her. She was taken by her brothers, in a palanquin, to a spot in the Himālayas. They there dug out an underground room and left her with sufficient food and water. They blocked up the entrance with wooden planks, and put a large heap of earth in front of it. Then they returned to Kapilavatthu. After living in this stuffy room for some time, she resumed her former beauty, for the heat cured her of leprosy. Now, not far from her cave lived a royal sage named Kola. While wandering about in the vicinity of his hermitage, Kola came to the cave and saw a tiger scratching up the heap of dirt with its feet. His curiosity was aroused. He drove away the tiger, removed the planks and opened the door of the cave, revealing the Sakyan girl. Seeing her exquisite beauty, the sage fell in love with her and took her to his hermitage. Sixteen pairs of twins were born to the couple. They were trained in

<sup>1</sup> *Majjhima*, ii, pp. 214ff; cf. *DPPN*, i, p. 689.

<sup>2</sup> *Āṅuttara*, ii, p. 558.

<sup>3</sup> *Mahāvastu*, i, pp. 352-55.

<sup>4</sup> *Apadāna*, i, p. 94.

<sup>5</sup> *Sum. Vil.*, i, pp. 260ff.

<sup>6</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>7</sup> *Dīgha*, i, p. 92; cf. *Sakyas* pp. 202ff; E. Müller, *JPTS*, 1888, p. 17.

<sup>8</sup> *Mahāvastu*, i, pp. 352-55.



Sakyan style by their mother, who sent them to Kapilavatthu. These children impressed the Sakyas who were then in session in their assembly-hall. They were given Sakyan girls in marriage, held Sakyan appointments, cultivated their lands and established villages. As the princes were sons of the sage Kola, they were known as Koliyas.

Though the account is legendary, it contains some historical points relevant to a discussion of the Koliyas. The connection of the Koliyas with Rāma, the king of Banaras, and with the sage Kola is significant. The Licchavis were also connected with a queen of Banaras who, according to Buddhaghosa, threw the lump of flesh she bore into the currents of the Ganges. The twins born of that lump are said to have been the ancestors of the Licchavis.<sup>1</sup> The relation of the Sakyas with Banaras is also implied for Piyā, the daughter of Okkāka, whom the Sakyas claimed as their ancestor,<sup>2</sup> is reported to have married Rāma or Kola of the *Mahāvastu*. Hence, the Koliyas are not only said to be related to the royal family of Banaras, but also to the Sakyas. That the Koliyas and the Sakyas intermarried is evident from the fact that the Buddha's mother is reported, in at least one source,<sup>3</sup> to have been the daughter of a Koliyan prince. Buddhaghosa further supports the existence of matrimonial alliances between the two peoples whose territories were adjacent, only divided by the river Rohiṇī.<sup>4</sup>

At this juncture we are unable to explain fully the attempt of the Buddhist commentator to connect these republican peoples with the royal house of Banaras. But it was evidently held a mark of honour, at least at the time when the commentaries and the *Jātakas* were written, to connect these tribes with the city which was looked on as the chief centre of power and culture in the north of ancient India. We know from the earlier sources that during the lifetime of the Buddha, the kingdom of Banaras was only a vassal territory, first under the suzerainty of Kosala,<sup>5</sup> and afterwards under Magadhan kings. However, it is reported to have attained in earlier times a high glory and power, dominating even the kingdoms of the Assakas, Avanti, Magadha, and Aṅga.<sup>6</sup> We further hear of a

<sup>1</sup> Cf. above, pp. 85ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Dīgha*, i, pp. 92ff.

<sup>3</sup> *Sum. Vil.*, i, p. 262.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 260-2; *Jāt.*, v, pp. 412-5.

<sup>5</sup> *Dīgha*, i, p. 228; *Mahāvagga*, viii, 2.

<sup>6</sup> *Jāt.*, v, p. 317.



king of Banaras even laying seige to the city of Takkasilā in the Gandhāra country with a view to extending the borders of his dominion. In the end, however, he was unsuccessful.<sup>1</sup> The Koliyas may have had relations with Banaras, but we are only certain of their being related to their close western neighbours, the Sakyas.

The allusion in the *Kuṇāla Jātaka*, in the words of the Sakyas, to the "Koliyas dwelling in the hollow of a *kola* tree," and the connection of the name with that of the *kola* is unanimously attested by all the Pāli sources which account for the origin of this ethnic group. If there is any truth in the connection of the Koliyas with the *kola* tree it may imply that sometime before they established themselves at Rāmagāma, they lived in a spot surrounded by *kola*-trees, or that they flourished around their capital. On the other hand, the Pāli texts contain so many obviously fantastic etymologies of this type that little reliance can be placed on the connection of Koliya and *kola*, especially as this is not mentioned in the *Mahāvastu* account.

### *Geographical Location*

The capital of the Koliyas was at Rāmagāma<sup>2</sup> which was situated about six *yojanas* (42 miles) to the east of Kapilavatthu. In this position Cunningham found the village of Deokali with a mound of ruins.<sup>3</sup> It was at this spot that the Koliyas erected a *stūpa* enshrining their portion of the relics of the Buddha claimed at Kusinārā.<sup>4</sup> Cunningham's location for Rāmagāma at the modern village of Deokali is just about 8-9 miles to the east of the river Rohiṇī, and about 80 miles to the north of the Ganges. But the *Mahāvamsa* states that the *stūpa* of Rāmagāma, which "stood on the bank of the Ganges, was destroyed by the action of the current."<sup>5</sup> Cunningham is right to correct the writer of the text by saying that the "Ganges is a simple fabrication of the Ceylonese chronicler."<sup>6</sup> All the Buddhist traditions agree in stating that the relics of the Buddha were divided into eight portions, of which one fell to the

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, ii, p. 217; cf. Gokuldas De, *Significance and Importance of the Jātakas*, p. 128.

<sup>2</sup> *Dīgha*, ii, pp. 165ff; though *Kuṇāla Jāt.*, v, pp. 412-5, calls it simply as *Koliyanagara*.

<sup>3</sup> *CAGIM*, p. 486.

<sup>4</sup> *Dīgha*, ii, pp. 165-7.

<sup>5</sup> *Mahāvamsa*, chap. xxxi, verse 25.

<sup>6</sup> *CAGIM*, p. 483.



lot of the Koliyas of Rāmagāma.<sup>1</sup> According to the Ceylonese tradition, the relic casket was washed away by the currents of the Ganges, and was discovered by the Nāgas, or water-gods, and presented to the Nāga king. He built a *stūpa* for its reception. During the reign of Dutthagāmini of Ceylon (161-137 B.C.), the casket was miraculously obtained from the Nāga king by the holy monk Sonuttara, and enshrined in the Great *stūpa* in the land of Laṅkā.<sup>2</sup>

This story is completely at variance with the statements of Fa-hsien and Hsüan Tsang, both of whom visited Rāmagāma many centuries after the time of Dutthagāmini, and found the relic *stūpa* intact, but no river. Fa-hsien, in the beginning of the 5th century A.D. saw a tank beside the *stūpa* in which, according to local tradition, lived a dragon (i.e. Nāga) who continually watched over the tower.<sup>3</sup> In the middle of the 7th century, Hsüan Tsang saw the same *stūpa* and the same tank of clear water inhabited by dragons (Nāgas), who daily transformed themselves into men and paid their adoration to the *stūpa*.<sup>4</sup> Both pilgrims mention Aśoka's attempt, abandoned on the expostulation of the Nāga king, to remove these relics to his own capital. In the Chinese accounts, the argument which the Nāga king gave to Aśoka is the same as that which he gave to dissuade the holy Sonuttara from removing the relics to Ceylon.<sup>5</sup>

We therefore infer, with Cunningham, that the original "tank" of Rāmagāma was "adroitly changed into a river" by the Ceylonese author so that the relics which were in the charge of the Nāgas of the tank might be conveyed to the ocean-palace of the Nāga king. From there they could as readily be conveyed to Ceylon as to any other place.<sup>6</sup> The river was thus necessary in the Ceylonese legend to transfer the relics from Rāmagāma to the ocean and to establish the authenticity of the remains enshrined in the Great *stūpa* of Anurādhapura. But the legend can have no weight against the united testimony of the two pilgrims who, independently and many centuries later, found the *stūpa* but saw no river. Hence, we reject

<sup>1</sup> *MPS*, pp. 442ff; *Dīgha*, ii, pp. 165ff; Rockhill, *op. cit.*, pp. 145ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Mahāvamsa*, chap. xxxi, verses 25ff.

<sup>3</sup> S. Beal, *Travels of Fah-Hian and Sung-Yun*, chap. xxiii, p. 90.

<sup>4</sup> Watters, *On Yuan-Chwang*, ii p. 20.

<sup>5</sup> *Mahāvamsa*, chap. xxxi, verses 45ff.

<sup>6</sup> *CAGIM*, p. 484.



the fabricated story of the river in preference to the one about the tank, reported by Fa-hsien and Hsüan Tsang. Apart from the evidence of this legend, the identification of Rāmagāma with Deokali is the most suitable one.<sup>1</sup>

Besides Rāmagāma and Devadaha, some other townships of the Koliyas are mentioned in the Buddhist books; Uttara, the residence of headman Pāṭaliya,<sup>2</sup> Sajjanela,<sup>3</sup> Sāpūga,<sup>4</sup> Kakkurapatta,<sup>5</sup> Holidavasana,<sup>6</sup> etc., but none of these places have yet been identified.

The river Rohiṇī divided the Koliyan territory from that of the Sakyas in the north-west,<sup>7</sup> and in the south-west it probably bordered the Kosalan kingdom.<sup>8</sup> It is likely that the river Anomā, the modern Rāpti, divided them. To the east of the Koliyas was the territory occupied by the Moriyas of Pipphalivana; to the north-east of the Koliyas lived the Mallas of Kusinārā. To the north of the Koliyas lay the Himālayan hills.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the Koliyan country was a thin strip of land from the river Sarayū (the modern Ghāgrā) in the south to the northern hills. Between the Rohiṇī on the west and Moriyas to the east the territory was only about 20 miles wide. On the map drawn by Cunningham, it appears that the region occupied by the Koliyas was no smaller than that occupied by the Sakyas.<sup>10</sup>

### *Government and Organization*

The governing authority of the Koliyas was vested in a general assembly of the Kṣatriya chiefs (*rājakulānam*) who are also referred to in the same source as *khattiyas*, *rājās*,<sup>11</sup> and *mahārājās*,<sup>12</sup> and whose sons are called *Koliyakumāras*.<sup>13</sup> In the vast range of the Pāli literature there is no mention of a single Koliyan *rājā* by name. The sole reference to a king of the Koliyas (*Koliyarājā*)<sup>14</sup> mentions him

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 485.

<sup>2</sup> *Samyutta*, iv, p. 340.

<sup>3</sup> *Anguttara*, ii, p. 62.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, ii, p. 194.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, iv, p. 281.

<sup>6</sup> *Majjhima*, i, p. 387; *Samyutta*, v, p. 115.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. above, pp. 194ff; *Jāt.*, v, pp. 412ff; *Sum. Vil.*, ii, p. 672; *Dhammapadaṭṭhakathā*, iii, pp. 254ff.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. our map A.

<sup>9</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>10</sup> *CAGIM*, map xi, pp. 444-5.

<sup>11</sup> *Jāt.*, v, p. 412.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 413-4.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 412-5.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, i, p. 407.

first as the father of a girl designated as *Koliyarājadhītaram*, whereas on the following page of the same *Jātaka* she is alluded to simply as *Koliyadhītā*.<sup>1</sup> We differ from Cowell in not taking the phrase *Koliyarājā* as a proper name, but we believe that it designated a Koliyan king who was the chief or head of the Koliyan assembly. He was not outstanding enough for his name to be remembered. We find no objection to the view that the Koliya *rājā* of the *Asātarūpa Jātaka* was only one of many Koliyan kings, and at the same time may have been the president of the Koliyan assembly. According to Altekar's suggestion the assembly consisted of a "few hundred" members.<sup>2</sup>

On the evidence of the *Kuṇāla Jātaka* all the members of the Koliyan assembly, like that of the Sakyan, were called *rājās* and sometimes even *mahārājās*. It may be that when the Buddha intervened in the feud which was imminent between the Koliyas and the Sakyas, and addressed them as *mahārājās*, he meant only the two chiefs of the Koliyas and the Sakyas who were then heads of their respective republics. When the Buddha arrived on the scene, all the kings (*rājāno*) greeted him, and when he started addressing them he questioned the *mahārājās*, probably implying the two chiefs. In the end, when the Buddha had settled the dispute by showing the futility of shedding precious blood, it was the *rājāno*, probably meaning the entire assembly members of both peoples, who were pleased with the compromise.<sup>3</sup> There is no corroboratory evidence to strengthen our view, but this seems likely from a close analysis of the *Jātaka* text.

The Koliyas, like the Sakyas, had a set of officers who appear to have been concerned with irrigation and agriculture, because during their feud the labourers went and reported the matters to the "officers appointed for that purpose".<sup>4</sup> The Koliyas had servants (*Koliya-kammakaras* or *sevakas*) working on their farms.<sup>5</sup> More relevant than the preceding officers to the republican system of the Koliyas are groups of officers, called *bhojakās*, *amaccās* and *uparājās*. These we have discussed in connection with the Sakyas. The source of our knowledge of these officers is the same text which refers to

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 408.

<sup>2</sup> Altekar, *State and Government*, p. 112.

<sup>3</sup> *Jāt.*, v, p. 414.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 413.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 412ff.



the Sakyas. Therefore we find no reason to disbelieve that the power, position and function of these officials was the same in the Koliyan republic as it was in their Sakyan counterpart,<sup>1</sup> especially as peoples appear to have been of kindred stocks.<sup>2</sup> On the same analogy, the *uparājās* would have succeeded their fathers in the assembly and the *amaccās*, or councillors, would have formed a smaller council to assist the head of the republic in the administration of public business.

Possibly attached to the Koliyan general assembly was a special body of peons, presumably police, bearing a special form of headdress with a drooping crest. They had no equal for their bad conduct and violence.<sup>3</sup> The text does not give us more information about them. Such officials might have been a regular feature of the Buddhist republics.<sup>4</sup>

### *The Koliyas and the Sakyas*

Both the Koliyas and the Sakyas were Kṣatriyas. The former were khattiyas of the *Vyagghapajja gotta*,<sup>5</sup> and they intermarried with the Sakyas. According to Buddhaghosa, the Buddha's mother was the daughter of a Koliyan noble,<sup>6</sup> Suppavāsā Koliyadhītā was also married to a Sakyan noble,<sup>7</sup> though the *Apadāna* says that the Licchavian Mahāli was her husband.<sup>8</sup> Buddhaghosa reports that the Koliyan youths once carried away many Sakyan maidens while they were bathing, but the Sakyans, regarding the Koliyans as relations, took no action.<sup>9</sup>

The famous story of the feud between the Sakyas and the Koliyas, which we have discussed in other connections,<sup>10</sup> seems to be founded on fact. Despite the good relations referred to in other sources, it is very probable that the Koliyas and the Sakyas sometimes quarrelled over the distribution of the water of the river forming their boundary.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. above, p. 195ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>3</sup> *Samyutta*, iv, pp. 341-2; cf. Jones, *op. cit.*, pp. 109ff.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *CHI*, i, p. 178; *DPPN*, i, p. 690.

<sup>5</sup> *Anguttara*, ii, 194-6; *Sum. Vil.*, i, pp. 262ff; *Sutta comm.*, i, p. 356; *Mahāvastu*, i, p. 355.

<sup>6</sup> *Sum. Vil.*, i, p. 262.

<sup>7</sup> *Man. Pur.*, (*SHB*) i, p. 244.

<sup>8</sup> *Apadāna*, ii, p. 494, verse 28.

<sup>9</sup> *Sum. Vil.*, i, p. 262.

<sup>10</sup> *Jāt.*, v, pp. 412-6; also alluded to in i, pp. 208, 327ff; iv, p. 207; cf. above, pp. 202ff.

Serious disputes of this kind, on a local or even on a national scale, are not unknown in the Indian sub-continent today. It is said that after the Buddha concluded peace between them, the Koliyas and the Sakyas gave 250 of their princes each to the Buddhist *saṅgha*.<sup>1</sup> We have no other account which reflects on the relations of the Koliyas with the Sakyas,<sup>2</sup> the other republics of the neighbourhood, or the Kosalan kingdom.

### *Political History*

We have no definite chronological data to show that the Koliyan-Sakyan feud preceded the defeat of the Sakyas by Viḍūḍabha, but it seems most unlikely that the latter event preceded the former. We have noticed that after Viḍūḍabha's victory the Sakyas virtually vanished from the Indian scene, not only as a political power, but also as an ethnic group. Only a few individual families remained, which dispersed and settled elsewhere.<sup>3</sup> This makes it highly probable that the Koliya-Sakyan feud occurred before the war between the Sakyas and the Kosalas. We cannot say definitely how many years before the decease of the Buddha the Koliya-Sakyan quarrel took place. The Koliyas also claimed a share in the relics of the Buddha and got an eighth portion which they enshrined at their chief town, Rāmagāma.<sup>4</sup>

After this we hear nothing of the Koliyas. The Nāga connection of the Koliyas of Rāmagāma has been made much of by D. D. Kosambi,<sup>5</sup> but this is irrelevant for our purpose at this point. There is no mention of the Koliyas siding with the Sakyas during their fatal fight with Viḍūḍabha. It is not impossible that they acted as did the Confederates of the Vajjian League against the Magadhan king Ajātasattu, since the Sakyans were their blood relations and shared with the Koliyas the principles of republican government. It is very probable that the Koliyas were finally absorbed by the Kosalans, though the possibility that they fell directly to Ajātasattu after his conquest of the Licchavis must not be overlooked.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 415.

<sup>2</sup> This dispute is also alluded to in some of the *Jātakas* preached at this occasion. *Jāt.*, i, pp. 208, 327; iv, p. 207; details in *Kuṇāla Jāt.*

<sup>3</sup> Cf. above, pp. 204ff.

<sup>4</sup> *Dīgha*, ii, pp. 165-7; *MPS*, pp. 442ff; Rockhill, *op. cit.*, pp. 145ff.

<sup>5</sup> *Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, pp. 122ff.



Probably the loss of life and property amongst the Koliyas was not much less than that of their relatives. Their united territory may thus have formed a part of the Kosalan kingdom during the lifetime of king Viḍūḍabha. Afterwards the Koliyan land became a part of the Magadhan empire. This happened sometime between the Sakyan war against Viḍūḍabha and the reign of Candragupta, the first Mauryan king. Since we hear of no successors of Viḍūḍabha, it is probable that soon after his defeat and destruction of the Sakyas and Koliyas, the Magadhan king Ajātasattu attacked, defeated, and probably killed him.<sup>1</sup> (The Koliyas, as a republic and a tribe, disappeared from the Indian political map, not long after the passing away of the Buddha.<sup>2</sup>)

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. above, pp. 205ff.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Law, *TAI*, pp. 205ff.

## CHAPTER TEN

### LESSER-KNOWN REPUBLICS

Apart from the republics treated at length in the preceding chapters, the existence of other republican tribes is also attested by the early Buddhist texts. But the evidence regarding them is meagre, and the scanty references made to them do not permit a fuller account of their republican or quasi-republican institutions. As the data available from the sources is so limited that no coherent picture of any of these political communities can be given, we only discuss some of their features, and choose to refer to them as "lesser-known republics." We cannot call them, at this stage, minor republics or by some such similar designation. Some may have been quite important but are not mentioned at great length in the Buddhist and Jaina texts because they did not give much support to the doctrines which the Buddha and Mahāvira expounded. There are four such republican peoples.

The Moriyas of Pipphalivana<sup>1</sup> and the Bulis of Allakappa<sup>2</sup> were among the claimants for shares in the relics of the Buddha on the ground that they were themselves, like the Exalted One, Kṣatriyas. The Bulis got the eighth portion of the relics and erected a *stūpa* enshrining their portion, at their capital town and celebrated the event with a feast.<sup>3</sup> According to the text, the Moriyas arrived after the relics had already been distributed among the eight earlier claimants, and they had to be contended with the embers (*aṅgāram*). They likewise honoured these remains by building a *stūpa* over them and celebrating a feast.<sup>4</sup> This story appears to be a little suspicious. Could it be that the story of the Moriyas' late arrival was interpolated at the time of Aśoka in order to link the royal family more closely with the Buddha? There is no mention of the Bhaggas of Suṃsumāragiri, and the Kālāmas of Kesaputta among those who claimed a share in the relics. This might suggest either their indifference towards Buddhism and its

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<sup>1</sup> *Dīgha*, ii, p. 165; Rockhill, *op. cit.*, p. 145; *MPS*, pp. 448ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166; Rockhill, *op. cit.*, p. 147; *MPS*, pp. 448-9.

<sup>3</sup> *Dīgha*, ii, pp. 166-7; *MPS*, pp. 446-7.

<sup>4</sup> *MPS*, pp. 448ff; *Dīgha*, ii, pp. 165ff.



founder or simply that they lived too far from Kusinārā. Nevertheless, their existence is attested by some other Pāli texts. The Buddha and the Venerable Mahā Moggallāna are reported to have stayed at Sumsumāragiri, the chief town of the Bhaggas, in the course of their wanderings.<sup>1</sup> The Kālāmas of Kesaputta are also explicitly mentioned in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* and its commentary.<sup>2</sup>

### THE MORIYAS OF PIPPHALIVANA

#### *Name and Origin*

The only source which contains an account of the origin and name of the Moriyas as a tribe, rather than as a ruling family, is the *Mahāvamsa Tīkā*.<sup>3</sup> According to one explanation, the Moriyas were so called because they rejoiced, *modāpi*, in the prosperity of their city. The commentator explains that by changing the *da* of the *modāpi* to *ra*, the word Moriya is obtained.<sup>4</sup> He further adds that being oppressed by king Viḍūḍabha, some Sakyas escaped into a delightful region of the Himālayas, which had the convenience of cool water, the shade of a grove of *pipphali* trees<sup>5</sup> (*pipphalivana*) and the fresh breezes. At this pleasant spot they established a boundary wherein they measured out excellent cities.<sup>6</sup>

According to the same source, there is another tradition which connects the name with the Pāli and Sanskrit word *mayūra*, peacock. The city which they founded had buildings of blue stone, like the neck of a peacock (*mayūragīvasaṅkāsa*), and the place always resounded with the shrill cries of peacocks.<sup>7</sup> The masters (*sāmino*) of the city, continues the commentator, were the Sakyas, but their sons and grandsons from then onward became known in the entire Jambudīpa only by the name of the Moriyas. This is why the following generations speak of their clan as the *Moriyavamsa*.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Majjhima*, i, p. 95; *Aṅguttara*, ii, p. 61; iv, p. 85; *Vinaya*, ii, p. 127; iv, pp. 115, 198; *Jāt.*, iii, p. 157, etc.

<sup>2</sup> *Aṅguttara*, ii, p. 188; *Man. Pūr.*, i, p. 418.

<sup>3</sup> *Vamsaṭṭha*, i, pp. 180ff.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 180.

<sup>5</sup> Normally *pipphali* means pepper. This, however, does not fit the context, and moreover pepper vines do not grow in the Himālayan foothills. Probably we are to take the term as equivalent to *pipphala*, the fruit of the *ficus religiosa* or *pīpal* tree; also *cp.* *MPS*, Skt., pp. 448-50.

<sup>6</sup> *Vamsaṭṭha*, i, p. 180.

<sup>7</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>8</sup> *Loc. cit.*; *Cf.* *DPPN*, ii, p. 673; *PHAI*, p. 194.



According to the first explanation, the word Moriya is derived from the root *mud*, to rejoice, and the commentator explains the change of *da* to *ra*. Then he gives an alternative etymology connecting the name with *mayūra*, peacock. The commentator states both traditions without committing himself to either, though his detailed explanation of the first might indicate his preference. But to us the first story seems more fantastic than the second. Neither story proves the connection of Moriya with either *mud* or *mayūra* any better than does that relating the Koliyas to the *kola* tree. However, we suggest that the name is not connected with *mud*, but with *mayūra*, which might well have given the name to these people, who perhaps originally looked on the peacock as their totem. The explanation that they also had buildings of blue stone, like the colour of a peacock's neck, is simply absurd.

A close examination of both stories points to the Buddhist writers' arduous attempts to establish a relationship between their Master's clan and that of the Moriyas, probably in order to connect the Mauryan emperor Aśoka with the line of the Śākyamuni. No reference to such a relationship occurs in the Pāli Canon itself and there is no other source to confirm such a blood-bond. If the tradition of the *Parinirvāṇa* is correct, the Moriyas were certainly not the later descendants of the Sakyas as we find both the Sakyas and the Moriyas claiming their share in the relics of the Buddha at his death.<sup>1</sup> The Moriyas were contemporaneous with the Sakyas and were probably of an old Aryan stock like the other republican peoples of the Buddhist and the Jaina texts. The only known early Buddhist source which mentions the Moriyas is the *Dīgha Nikāya*. Raychaudhuri and Law have both accepted the connection of the Moriyas and the Sakyas without any solid evidence.<sup>2</sup>

The first tradition<sup>3</sup> also attempts to explain the naming of the Moriyān capital by stating that the spot where they founded the city was located in a *pīpphalivana*. We have no other source indicating such a basis for the name of Pīpphalivana. It would normally mean "a grove of pepper vines;" not at all suitable for giving shelter to the refugees of the tribe.

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<sup>1</sup> MPS, pp. 448ff; *Dīgha*, ii, pp. 165ff; *Buddhavaṃsa*, chap. xxviii, 4.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. PHAI, p. 194; Law, TAI, pp. 288-9.

<sup>3</sup> *Varṇsaṭṭha*, i, p. 180.



### *Geographical Location*

The *Dīgha Nikāya*,<sup>1</sup> the *Buddhavaṃsa*,<sup>2</sup> and the *Mahāvamsa Tīkā*<sup>3</sup> all indicate that the chief town and centre of Moriyān power was at Pippalivana. This town is apparently identical with the *Nyagrodhavana* or Banyan Grove, a village in the Gorakhpur district of Uttar Pradesh which contained the famous Embers' *stūpa* and is mentioned by Hsüan Tsang.<sup>4</sup> Fa-hsien tells that the *stūpa* lay four *yojanas* to the east of the river Anomā (Rāpti) and twelve *yojanas* to the west of Kusinārā.<sup>5</sup> Cunningham commented that as Kāsiā (Kusinārā) lay 35 miles to the east of Gorakhpur, the Moriyā town could not have been situated very far from the last mentioned city.<sup>6</sup> There are no serious arguments against this identification, which we provisionally accept.

The territory occupied by the Moriyas does not appear to have been very extensive. On the basis of the above evidence the Moriyas also seem to have been close neighbours of the Koliyas, situated to the west of them. To the southwest of the Moriyas the river Anomā (Rāpti) divided them from the Kosalan kingdom. The Mallian country lay to the east, and south of the Moriyas flowed the river Ghāgrā, the Sarayū of the Epic. The region, if measured on the map, does not seem to have been more than 25 miles from east to west up to the river Anomā, and about 50-55 miles from north to south up to the river Ghāgrā.<sup>7</sup> To our knowledge no other town of the Moriyas is mentioned in the Buddhist texts.<sup>8</sup>

### *Government and Organization*

The Moriyas were Kṣatriyas like other republican communities of the Buddhist period, and it is on this basis that they advanced their case for a share in the relics at Kusinārā. We hear of no single

<sup>1</sup> *Dīgha*, ii, pp. 166-7; *MPS*, pp. 448-50.

<sup>2</sup> *Buddhavaṃsa*, chap. xxviii, 4.

<sup>3</sup> *Vamsaṭṭha*, i, pp. 180ff, which also calls it *Moriyanagara* (p. 183); cf. *CHI*, i, p. 175.

<sup>4</sup> Watters, *op. cit.*, ii, pp. 23-4; *CAGIM*, pp. 491ff, 496ff; *PHAI*, p. 194; Pandey, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

<sup>5</sup> Legge, *Travels of Fa-Hsien*, p. 79; Watters, *ibid.*, i, p. 141; cf. *CAGIM*, p. 491; *PHAI*, p. 194.

<sup>6</sup> *CAGIM*, p. 493.

<sup>7</sup> *Loc. cit.*; map xi, pp. 444-5; cf. *PHAI*, p. 194 fn. 4.

<sup>8</sup> See our map A.



Moriyan king in the Buddhist sources which refer to them, except, of course, the imperial Mauryas of later times. On the other hand, there is ground to believe that they were ruled by a republican or quasi-republican form of government. Upon hearing that the Buddha had passed away, it was the Moriyas of Pippalivana, and not an individual Moriyaruler, who sent an envoy to the Mallas asking for a share in the remains of the Exalted One.<sup>1</sup> The *Buddhavaṃsa* also alludes to the same fact,<sup>2</sup> and the Tibetan tradition further strengthens this view that the embers went to the *Nyagrodhika* country (Pippalivana).<sup>3</sup>

The *Mahāvamsa Tīkā* refers to them as the Moriya kings of the Moriya city. The *Tīkā* always mentions them in the plural, i.e. *Moriyarājānaṃ*, and the young Moriyas are invariably called *rājakumāras* or princes.<sup>4</sup> This clearly shows that the Moriyas of Pippalivana were a republican people like the Sakyas, the Mallas, and the Licchavis, and that the college of Moriyarulers were all called *rājās*. We have no definite evidence with regard to their internal administration and judicial system. But it would be legitimate to suggest that they had a general assembly of elders who chose a chief from amongst themselves, probably for life. He probably ran the administration of the republic with the help of a few members of the assembly, which was the source of his power. It was this body of the Moriyas which most likely sent an envoy to Kusinārā to claim a share in the relics of the Buddha. We do not know the number of the Moriyas who constituted this assembly and council.<sup>5</sup>

### *Political History*

We have suggested above that the Moriyas were probably an ethnic group which had moved with the eastward march of the Aryans. We have also shown that the story of the *Mahāvamsa Tīkā* has no historical truth in representing the Moriyas as an offshoot of the Sakyas. Moreover, the geographical location of the former also strengthens the evidence against the Sakya-Moriyan relationship. The Moriyas inhabited a land southeast of that of the Sakyas, while north of the Moriyas lay the Mallian territory, bordering on the

<sup>1</sup> *MPS*, p. 448; *Dīgha*, ii, pp. 165ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Buddhavaṃsa*, chap. xxviii, 4.

<sup>3</sup> Rockhill, *op. cit.*, p. 147; cf. *PHAI*, p. 194

<sup>4</sup> *Vaṃsaṭṭha.*, i, p. 183.

<sup>5</sup> *Cp.* Altekar, *State and Government*, pp. 121-2, 132.



Himālayan mountains. This shows that the Moriyas, as compared with the Sakyas, were by no means in the Himālayan region as the *Ṭikā* would have us believe.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the Koliyan territory, to the west of the Moriyas, lay between the Sakyas and the Moriyas, separating the two.

The *Mahāvamsa Ṭikā* continues the history of the Moriyas, saying that, "then did the Brāhmaṇa Cāṇakka anoint a glorious youth, known by the name of Candagutta, as king over all Jambudīpa, born of a noble clan, the Moriyas [*Moriyakula-sambhavo*], when, filled with bitter hate, he had slain the ninth Nanda Dhanananda."<sup>2</sup> The *Mahāvamsa Ṭikā*<sup>3</sup> and the *Dīpavamsa*<sup>4</sup> also record the same tradition. These sources not only connect the founder of the Magadhan Mauryan dynasty, Candragupta, with the Moriyas, but the *Mahāvamsa Ṭikā* further states that Aśoka's mother, Dhammā, was also a Moriyān princess.<sup>5</sup>

There was a Sinhalese clan so called,<sup>6</sup> probably taking its name from the ancient republican Moriyas, hence connecting them with Aśoka and the Buddha. But curiously enough, Cāṇakya as a rule addresses Candragupta Maurya as *Vṛṣala*, i.e. a person of low birth, in Viśākhadatta's *Mudrārākṣasa*. He is also said by the commentaries of the play to have been an illegitimate son of the last Nanda king by a Śūdra woman named Murā.<sup>7</sup> This is an imaginative etymology, concocted by someone who was not aware of the existence of the Moriyas in the Buddha's day. Raychaudhuri<sup>8</sup> and Law<sup>9</sup> both support the relationship of the Moriyas of Pipphalivana and the Maurya dynasty of Magadha on the basis of evidence produced by the Ceylonese texts, and there seems to be no valid objection to Raychaudhuri's view when he says that "the Moriyas (Mauryas) were the same clan which gave Magadha its greatest dynasty".<sup>10</sup> But Law goes further and declares that "there may be

<sup>1</sup> *Vamsaṭṭha.*, i, p. 180; *CAGIM*, map xi, pp 444-5; our map A.

<sup>2</sup> *Mahāvamsa comm.*, chap. v, 16-17; *cp.* *Arthaśāstra*, concluding verse.

<sup>3</sup> *Vamsaṭṭha.*, i, pp. 183ff.

<sup>4</sup> *Dīpavamsa*, vi, 19; tr. p. 148.

<sup>5</sup> *Vamsaṭṭha.*, i, p. 189.

<sup>6</sup> *Cūlavamsa*, chaps. xxxviii, 13; xli, 69.

<sup>7</sup> *Mudrārākṣasa*, act iii, pp. 82ff; *cf.* notes p. 232.

<sup>8</sup> *PHAI*, pp. 194ff.

<sup>9</sup> Law, *TAI*, p. 288.

<sup>10</sup> *PHAI*, p. 194.



some truth in the suggestion that the Moriyas were in some way connected with the Śākyas of Kapilavastu." Moreover, Law states, without giving his arguments or quoting his sources, that the royal family of the Nandas was connected by matrimonial alliance with the Moriyas of Pipphalivana.<sup>1</sup> We have seen above that there seems to have been no historical basis for the relationship between the Moriyas and the Sakyas, and to our knowledge there is no source which would support Law's claim of matrimonial alliances being contracted between the Moriyas and the Nandas.

In the absence of further positive evidence we can only tentatively suggest, from the linguistic and ethnographical points of view, that it is not impossible that the Moriyas of Pipphalivana and the Maurya dynasty of Magadha were related to each other, and that Candragupta Maurya was a scion of some Moriyian family, originally of Pipphalivana. But the stories so elaborately expanded and dwelt upon by the Buddhist writers, in their arduous attempt to establish a blood-relationship between the Moriyas and the Sakyas, appear to be false or at least extremely suspect.

In the unhistorical atmosphere of the times, it would be natural for the earnest Buddhist monks to conceive, from their extreme devotion to the Sakyan sage, that their great patron, Aśoka, must himself have been a blood relation of the Buddha. Such being the case, a story to account for his relationship would be concocted and implicitly believed, perhaps even by the monks who devised it. This would be especially true if they had felt themselves inspired by some supernatural insight. Alternatively, it is possible that the story of the connexion of the Moriyas with the Sakyas arose in Ceylon itself. The powerful Moriyian clan in Ceylon would have appreciated evidence linking it to the race of the Buddha. The monks of the Island, as well, might have wished to connect Aśoka, by whose missions Ceylon was first converted to Buddhism, with the founder of their faith.

We believe that the Moriyas were not the descendants but the contemporaries of the Sakyas. They appear to have ceased to be a political force soon after the death of the Buddha. They were probably defeated by Ajātasattu after he had subdued the Vajjis and their territory became part of the expanding empire of Magadha.)

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<sup>1</sup> Law, *TAI*, pp. 288-9.



## THE BULIS OF ALLAKAPPA

*Name and Etymology*

We are unable to give the proper derivation of the name of the Bulis, but it may well be connected with the Sanskrit root *bul* (*bolayati*), meaning "to cause to sink" or "submerge".<sup>1</sup> Their capital town, Allakappa<sup>2</sup> appears to be a compound of *alla*, moist or wet, and *kappa* (Sanskrit *kalpa*), "anything made with a definite object in view" or "that which is fit and suitable".<sup>3</sup> This would imply that their capital was "suitably damp" or "almost damp". However, these are only suggestions.

*Geographical Location*

According to Malalasekera, Allakappa country was "near Magadha,"<sup>4</sup> and Majumdar Sastri connects the neighbouring Veṭhadipa with Kāsiā.<sup>5</sup> However, Hoey identified Veṭhadipa with Bettiah in the Camparan district of Bihar.<sup>6</sup> These suggestions are most likely guesses. Just as it is impossible to give an elaborate picture of this republic and its institutions, so the sources do not support us in locating them geographically. The only thing that can be said at present is that the Bulis of Allakappa were neighbours of the Veṭhadipaka-Dronagrāmakas,<sup>7</sup> and that they were not very far from the last scene of the Buddha's life.

*Form of Government*

There is no reference to the Bulis in the *Anguttara*, the *Samyutta*, and the *Majjhima Nikāya*, or any other Buddhist text. Only in the *Dīgha Nikāya* do they receive a mere mention.<sup>8</sup> Not even the elaborate and legendary *Jātakas* refer to either the Bulis or to their town. The *Dhammapadaṭṭhakathā* gives an account of the *Allakappa-ratṭha* and a king referred to as *Allakappa-rājā*.<sup>9</sup> But there seems

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Pāṇini, *Dhātupāṭha*, xxxii, 62; Monier Williams, *Skt.-Eng. Dic.*, s.v. *bul*.

<sup>2</sup> *Dīgha*, ii, pp. 165ff.; *MPS*, pp. 434ff.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Pāli-Eng. Dic.*, s.v. *alla*, *kappa*; Monier Williams *Skt.-Eng. Dic.*, s.v. *kalpa*, healthy and vigorous.

<sup>4</sup> *DPPN*, i, p. 191.

<sup>5</sup> *CAGIM*, p. 714; cf. Fleet in *JRAS*, 1906, p. 900 fn.

<sup>6</sup> Hoey as quoted in *PHAI*, p. 193; cf. *PHAI*, p. 193.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. below, p. 248ff. Appx. E.

<sup>8</sup> *Dīgha*, ii, pp. 165ff.; *MPS*, pp. 434ff.; Rockhill pp. 145ff.

<sup>9</sup> i, pp. 161ff.

little truth in this last account. Allakappa can hardly be the proper name of the king. Probably it was a title by which the chief ruler of the Allakappa country was called, as the king of the Videhas was referred to as Videha,<sup>1</sup> and that of the Koliyas was called Koliya-rājā.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, if the government of the Allakappa country had been monarchical, the messenger who was sent to Kusinārā to claim their share in the relics of the Buddha would have spoken as an envoy of the Bulian king with proper titles, as did the ambassador from the Magadhan king.<sup>3</sup>

In the account of the sharing of the relics of the Buddha, the striking similarity in the manner of the claim advanced by the Bulis to that of other republican peoples makes it highly probable that the Bulis had a republican organization. The text reads that "the Bulis of Allakappa heard the news that the Exalted One had passed away at Kusinārā. And the Bulis of Allakappa [not the king of the Bulis] sent a messenger to the Mallas, saying, 'The Exalted One was a Khattiya and so are we. We are worthy to receive a portion of the relics of the Exalted One. Over the remains of the Exalted One will we put up a sacred cairn, and in their honour will we celebrate a feast'." <sup>4</sup>

That the Bulis claimed such a share is confirmed from other versions of the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* in Sanskrit, Tibetan, and Chinese.<sup>5</sup> In this respect they are better documented than the Brāhmaṇas of Veṭhadīpa. The location of the latter, according to the Pāli version, remains vague, as we do not know of any island of that name.<sup>6</sup>

### *Government and Organization*

The combined testimony of the *Dīgha Nikāya*, the *Buddhavaṃsa*,<sup>7</sup> and the *Dhammapada Commentary* shows that the Bulis had no king in the sense that the Magadhans and the Kosalans had. On the other hand, they had a chief or president, like the other republics probably chosen for life, who was assisted by a council and an assem-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. above, pp. 147ff.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. above, pp. 213ff.

<sup>3</sup> MPS, p. 434.

<sup>4</sup> *Dīgha*, ii, p. 165.

<sup>5</sup> MPS, p. 434.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Appx. E, pp. 248-49.

<sup>7</sup> Chap. xxviii, 2.



bly. We have no positive evidence for the existence of the council. That an assembly existed at Allakappa, however, can be inferred from the *Dīgha Nikāya*.<sup>1</sup> It is beyond doubt that the messenger sent to Kusinārā, if not sent by a king, was sent by important Bulians who must have formed such administrative bodies as a council and an assembly. Smaller republics, like the Nāyas and the Koliyas, had such institutions, and the case of the Bulis of Allakappa was probably the same.

According to the *Dhammapada Commentary*, the extent of Allakapparaṭṭha was only ten leagues, as was the Veṭhadiparaṭṭha, or more accurately the Droṇagrāma settlement of the Dhūmragotra Brāhmaṇas,<sup>2</sup> ruled by Veṭhadipaka *rājā*.<sup>3</sup> We believe that the kings of Allakappa and Veṭhadipa-Droṇagrāma were no more than chiefs, and, in the case of the former at least, only the head of a republic. This was also the case with the Koliyarājā of the Koliyas.<sup>4</sup> The same source further informs us of the intimate relations that existed between the two tribes. This would suggest that the two territories were near each other,<sup>5</sup> thus revealing the weakness of Kauṭilya's *maṇḍala* theory, according to which they should have been natural enemies.<sup>6</sup>

We have no evidence regarding their internal administration and relations with other tribes. Nor can anything be said about the true nature of their relations with the Veṭhadipaka -Droṇagrāmakas. Like the Koliyas and the Sakyas they might have been normally on good terms, with occasional disputes and feuds. Probably both the Bulis and the Veṭhadipaka-Droṇagrāmakas were followers of the Buddha, and hence they obtained a mention in the Buddhist sources.

#### THE BHAGGAS OF SUMSUMĀRAGIRI

##### *Name and Etymology*

The word Bhagga may have the sense of broken (Sanskrit *bhagna*),<sup>7</sup> or may be equivalent to the Sanskrit *bhāgya*, fortune or

<sup>1</sup> *Dīgha*, ii, pp. 165ff.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. below, pp. 248-49, Appx. E.

<sup>3</sup> *Dhammapadaṭṭha*, i, p. 161.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. above, pp. 213ff.

<sup>5</sup> *Dhammapadaṭṭha*, i, p. 161ff; *PHAI*, p. 193.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. above, pp. 123ff.

<sup>7</sup> *Jāt.*, i, p. 493.

good luck.<sup>1</sup> Some scholars, however, have linked the Bhaggas with the Bhargas of the Sanskrit sources.<sup>2</sup> The earliest mention of the Bhargas is made in the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, where a Bhargāyana prince named Kairiśi Sutvan is referred to.<sup>3</sup> They also figure in Pāṇini, where they are grouped with the Yaudheyas.<sup>4</sup> The *Bhīṣma Parva* of the *Mahābhārata* also mentions the Bhargas along with other peoples like the Āndhras, Kirātas, Kosalas, etc.<sup>5</sup> At another place in the *Mahābhārata*,<sup>6</sup> and also in the *Harivaṃśa*,<sup>7</sup> the Bhargas are associated with the Vatsas as well as with the Niṣādas, in the list of peoples conquered by Arjuna.<sup>8</sup> The *Harivaṃśa* tradition describes the Bhargas and the Vatsas as the two sons of Pratardana and the Buddhist books also associate the Bhaggas with the Vaṃsa prince Bodhi, son of king Udena, who resided in a magnificent palace built for him at Suṃsumārāgiri.<sup>9</sup>

Raychaudhuri<sup>10</sup> and Law<sup>11</sup> both support the connection of the Bhargas of the Sanskrit texts and the Bhaggas of the Pāli sources, and there does not seem to be any evidence which disproves such a relationship between the two. We accept this connection only as the most probable one, because no other text contradicts it. But Law's adventurous suggestion identifying the Bhaggas, Bhargas and the Bhārgavas as "one and the same people"<sup>12</sup> is not borne out by the Pāli texts, where the Bhaggavas appear as a caste of potters.<sup>13</sup> There is also a Brāhmaṇic *gotra* name Bhārgava and quite a few people are mentioned as Bhaggavas in the Buddhist texts and commentaries.<sup>14</sup> There is a great possibility of the Bhargas and the Bhaggas being of the same ethnic group, and it may be possible that these people had more than one settlement. But we strongly dispute

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Pāli-Eng. Dic.*, s.v. *Bhagga*.

<sup>2</sup> *PHAI*, pp. 192-3; Law, *TAI*, pp. 292-3.

<sup>3</sup> *Ait. Br.*, viii, 28.

<sup>4</sup> Pāṇini, iv, 1, 178.

<sup>5</sup> *Mbh.* (Poona Edn.), *Bhīṣma Parva*, chap. x, 48ff.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, ii, 30, 10.

<sup>7</sup> *Harivaṃśa*, xxix, 73.

<sup>8</sup> *Mbh.*, *Aśvamedha Parva*, chap. lxxxii, pp. 157ff, as quoted in *PHAI*, pp. 192-3.

<sup>9</sup> *Majjhima*, ii, pp. 91ff; *Jāt.*, iii, pp. 157ff.

<sup>10</sup> *PHAI*, pp. 192ff.

<sup>11</sup> Law, *TAI*, pp. 292ff.

<sup>12</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>13</sup> *Majjhima*, ii, pp. 237ff; *Jāt.*, ii, p. 80.

<sup>14</sup> *Dīgha*, iii, pp. 1ff; *Sum. Vil.*, i, p. 35; *Therīgāthā Comm.*, p. 2; cf. tr. *Dialogues*, iii, p. 7 fn 3.



Law's suggestion of linking the Bhārgavas also with them. Bharga is apparently a simple ethnic name, while Bhārgava is a secondary formation derived from the name of the legendary ṛṣi Bhṛgu.

### *Geographical Location*

On the authority of the epic and the *Apadāna*, Raychaudhuri located the Bhaggas in the Vindhyan region between the Yamunā and the Śona rivers.<sup>1</sup> But Malalasekera proposed a more reasonable, though still vague, location of their territory, somewhere between Vesāli and Sāvatti.<sup>2</sup> Their connection with the kingdom of the Vamsas (Vatsas), and the fact of their having a republican constitution, would suggest that the Bhagga territory lay to the north of the Vamsan capital, Kosāmbī, and to the west of Banaras. The kingdom of Kosala lay to the north of the Bhagga land.<sup>3</sup> Thus, they should be located somewhere north of the river Yamunā and south of the Ganges, not far north of Kosāmbī or west of Prayāga. As they seem to have been under the control and influence of the kingdom of Vatsa, they probably inhabited some part of that kingdom. We suggest that their location between the two great rivers seems to be most appropriate, despite the objection that it is separated by Kāśī and the Kosalan kingdom on the east, and north from the other republican peoples—the Licchavis, Mallas, Moriyas, Koliyas, and Sakyas.<sup>4</sup>

### *Status and Government*

There are a number of references to the Bhaggas of Sumsumāragiri in connection with the visits of the Buddha in the early part of his career.<sup>5</sup> Bhagga appears to be the name of both the people and the land they occupied,<sup>6</sup> including their capital town Sumsumāragiri with its surrounding region. Some of the *Vinaya* rules for the monks were laid down there,<sup>7</sup> and there are other scattered

<sup>1</sup> *PHAI*, p. 193.

<sup>2</sup> *DPPN*, s.v., Sumsumāragiri.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. our map A.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Basham's map in *Ājivikas*; C. C. Davies, *Historical Atlas*, map ii; our map A.

<sup>5</sup> *Anguttara*, ii, p. 61; iii, pp. 295-7; iv, pp. 85, 228ff; v, pp. 228-9, 232; *Majjhima*, ii, p. 91; etc.; cf. *DPPN*, ii, p. 1172.

<sup>6</sup> *Majjhima*, ii, p. 91; *Jāt.*, iii, p. 157; cf. *DPPN*, ii, p. 345.

<sup>7</sup> *Vinaya*, v, p. 145.

references to the Bhaggas and their country.<sup>1</sup> The *Majjhima Nikāya* also contains at least three *suttas* that were delivered at Sumsumāra Hill.<sup>2</sup> The *Dhonasākhā Jātaka* was also narrated at the Bhaggan capital.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, there are a few references to them in the *Samyutta Nikāya*<sup>4</sup> and other sources.<sup>5</sup>

Most of the sources mentioned above merely strengthen the evidence for the existence of the Bhaggas and their chief town Sumsumāragiri at the time of the Buddha, without giving much information about their political institutions. Yet one significant fact emerges from the study of the Bhaggas, that they had no hereditary kings, like the Vatsas, the Kosalans and the Magadhans. This suggests that they were a non-minarchical community like the Bulis, Moriyas, Koliyas, etc. However, they were not one of the claimants for the remains of the Buddha at his death. Hence, the Bhaggas might not have been absolutely free, other possible alternatives are that they were either too far away and had not heard the news, or that they were not very sympathetic to Buddhism. The mention in the *Majjhima Nikāya*,<sup>6</sup> the *Vinaya Piṭaka*,<sup>7</sup> and the *Dhonasākhā Jātaka*<sup>8</sup> of the Vatsan prince Bodhi's having a palace called Konkāṇḍa built for himself at Sumsumāragiri could suggest the control and influence of the Vatsan king on the Bhaggas.

The *Jātaka* tells us that the architect who built this palace was blinded so that he could not build another like it.<sup>9</sup> The *Dhammapada* Commentary, however, dramatically narrates that the architect had been warned of this by Bodhi's friend, and that he escaped on a magic bird.<sup>10</sup> We do not believe that there is any truth in either version, which contains a widespread theme in folk tradition, or that such a magnificent palace even existed at Sumsumāragiri. But the significant point, attested by almost all the sources, is that a Vatsan prince lived at the Bhaggan capital, apparently as a viceroy of his

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, ii, pp. 127; iv, pp. 115, 198.

<sup>2</sup> *Majjhima*, i, pp. 95ff, 323ff; ii, pp. 91ff.

<sup>3</sup> *Jāt.*, iii, pp. 157ff.

<sup>4</sup> *Samyutta*, iii, p. 1; iv, p. 116.

<sup>5</sup> *Pap. Sūd.*, i, p. 292; *Sārattha.*, ii p. 181. *Dhammapadaṭṭha.*, iii, pp. 137ff.

<sup>6</sup> *Majjhima*, ii, pp. 91ff; cf. *Pap. Sūd.*, ii, p. 739.

<sup>7</sup> *Vinaya*, ii, p. 127; iii, p. 199.

<sup>8</sup> *Jāt.*, iii, p. 157.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 157-8.

<sup>10</sup> *Dhammapadaṭṭha.*, iii, pp. 134ff.



father. The texts do not explicitly state this, but the fact that the prince lived there, and erected a building at the Bhaggan capital, would strongly suggest that the Bhaggas were not free—at least in their external affairs and foreign policy. It is possible then that they were a republican tribe with modified independence.

As usual the commentaries give a fanciful etymology of the chief city of the Bhaggas. They state that it was so called because when it was being built a crocodile (*sumsumāra*) made a noise in a lake nearby.<sup>1</sup> The late *Apadāna* mentions the Bhaggas with the Kārusas in a list of tribes.<sup>2</sup> This throws no light on the republican institutions of this political community, but does show that the Bhaggas were remembered as a separate ethnic group. Later generations may have remembered this tribe, because of its internal independence and republican institutions, even though it was subordinate to the Vatsan king.

We know nothing of their assembly and the council, but we presume that they had such bodies like the other republican tribes of the time. Nothing is known of their administration of public business and dispensation of justice. Probably they appointed a chief who presided over the Bhaggan assembly and carried out the administration of the republic with the help of a few Bhagga elders. It is likely that they did not retain their freedom long and fell to the King of the Vatsas, as did the Sakyas to the Kosalan king. We hear of no incidents or quarrels of the Bhaggas with neighbouring peoples. This may be because they had already been assimilated into the kingdom of Udayana, as the Buddha visited Sumsumāragiri only in the early years of his preaching career. But possibly they lost freedom during the reign of Udayana's successor for, as we have shown, from the distribution of the Buddha's relics we cannot disprove that they were independent at the time. (However, as an independent republican tribe, the Bhaggas vanished from the map of India about the time the Buddha breathed his last.)

### THE KĀLĀMAS OF KESAPUTTA

#### *Name and Early History*

The Kālāmas of Kesaputta are the least documented of the republican communities that flourished at the time of the Buddha

<sup>1</sup> *Pap. Sūd.*, i, p. 292; *Sārattha.*, ii, p. 181.

<sup>2</sup> *Apadāna*, ii, p. 359.



and Mahāvira. The striking similarity of the name of their town to the Keśins of the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*<sup>1</sup> has led historians to connect these peoples with the Keśins of the Brāhmaṇic period. Kesaputta (Sanskrit *Keśaputra*) and Keśin both are connected with the Sanskrit word *keśa*, meaning hair or mane. The connection between the two seems phonetically and linguistically obvious, but a discussion of the sources is necessary before deciding the issue.

Keśin, as the name of a people, occurs in the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, where their king is mentioned as learning from Khaṇḍika the atonement for a bad omen at the time of performing a sacrifice.<sup>2</sup> A Keśin Dārbhya or Dālbhya is a somewhat enigmatic figure.<sup>3</sup> According to the *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* this inexplicable person was the son of king Uccaiḥśrava's sister.<sup>4</sup> His people, according to the *Kāṭhaka Samhitā*, were the Pāñcālas, of whom the Keśins were one of the three branches.<sup>5</sup> Dālbhya was a contemporary of a fellow sage Keśin Śātyakāmi by name.<sup>6</sup>

Keith and Macdonell say that in view of the fact that the early literature mentions Dārbhya as a sage, it seems doubtful whether the commentator is correct in thinking that the *Śatapatha* refers to a king and a people. A sage alone may well be meant, while the *Jaiminīya Upaniṣad Brāhmaṇa*, which refers to him as a prince, is of no great authority.<sup>7</sup> They further suggest that the "later work may have assumed that the reference in the *Kāṭhaka Samhitā* to the Keśin people signifies kingship, but this is hardly necessary".<sup>8</sup> Keith and Macdonell may be right in doubting the accuracy of the commentator about the Keśin king and a Keśin sage. But in our opinion they are over-cautious when they dismiss the *Jaiminīya Upaniṣad Brāhmaṇa* as "of no great authority," simply because it is somewhat later than the more famous *Brāhmaṇas*. Even if generally accepted as unauthentic and known to be late, the text may contain some historical information, as for example do Buddhaghosa's commentaries and the *Jātakas*.

<sup>1</sup> *Sat. Br.*, xi, 8, 4, 6; cf. Pāṇini, v, 2, 109; vi, 4, 165.

<sup>2</sup> *Sat. Br.*, xi, 8, 4, 6ff; cf. Eggeling, *SBE*, 44, pp. 131-4; *Vedic Index* i, p. 187.

<sup>3</sup> *Sat. Br.*, xi, 8, 4, 1ff.

<sup>4</sup> *Jaim. Br.*, iii, 21, 1ff.

<sup>5</sup> *Kāṭh. Sam.*, xxx, 2; cf. *Vedic Index* i, p. 187.

<sup>6</sup> *Mait. Sam.*, i, 6, 5; *Tait. Sam.*, ii, 6, 2, 3.

<sup>7</sup> *Vedic Index*, i, p. 187.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 187.



We cannot say definitely in the face of the controversy discussed above, whether the Keśin of the *Śatapatha* refers to a king of the Keśins or to a sage who was a Keśin. If the text is to be believed, there were Keśin people and the question whether Dārbhya was king or sage is of no relevance for our present purpose. According to the *Kāṭhaka Samhitā*, as we have noticed above, the Keśins belonged to the Pāñcālas.<sup>1</sup> It is most likely that the Keśins were related to the Kālāmas of Kesaputta,<sup>2</sup> as were the Moriyas of Pipphalivana to the Mauryan dynasty of Magadha. We have seen that most of the republican peoples of northeast India appear to have been descended from Aryan pioneers who followed the example of Videgha Māthava<sup>3</sup> in their eastward march. It would be quite in harmony with the texts if we suggest that some Keśins of Pāñcāla also established a settlement in the northeast, designating it after their tribal name Keśaputra or Kesaputta of the Pāli texts.

We are not certain about the derivation of the name Kālāma, but Kālāma is a student of the Kalāma or Kālāpa grammar in Pāṇini,<sup>4</sup> and the school of Kalāpin is often mentioned with that of the Kaṭhas.<sup>5</sup> Whether Kālāma has any connection with the Sanskrit word *kāla*, dark or blue-back, is not certain.

### *Geographical Location*

The Dārbhyas who appear in the *Ṛg Veda* are referred to as settled on the banks of the Gomatī,<sup>6</sup> which Raychaudhuri suggests might be the Gumti which flows between the Ganges and the Ghāgrā.<sup>7</sup> But it seems strange that the *Ṛg Vedic* text should refer to such an eastern river. Even the Ganges is referred to only a few times in the *Ṛg Veda*. In Monier Williams' opinion, the Gomatī referred to in some hymns fell into the Indus.<sup>8</sup> It was probably in that region that the Keśins of the *Ṛg Veda* were settled. Probably during the later Vedic period they moved to the Pāñcāla region, from where a branch

<sup>1</sup> *Kāṭh. Sam.*, xxx, 2ff; cf. above, p. 231.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *PHAI*, pp. 99, 193.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. above, pp. 60ff.

<sup>4</sup> Pāṇini, iv, 3, 104; *Mbh.*, ii, 113; cf. *Vedic Index*, i p. 187.

<sup>5</sup> Monier Williams, *Skt. - Eng. Dic.*, s.v. *kālāpa*, *kālāpaka*.

<sup>6</sup> *RV*, v, 61.

<sup>7</sup> *PHAI*, p. 193.

<sup>8</sup> *RV*, viii, 24, 30; x, 75, 10; cf. Monier Williams, *Skt. - Eng. Dic.*, s.v. Gomatī under *go*.

of them moved further eastwards and settled at Kesaputta, sometime before the days of the Buddha.

The chief town of the Kālāmas, Kesaputta, is referred to as a *nigama* of the Kosalan kingdom in the *Āṅguttara Nikāya*.<sup>1</sup> Then we could locate Kesaputta *nigama* of the Kālāmas somewhere between the territory bounded by the river Gomati to the west, and the river Ghāgrā to the northeast, with the Ganges to the south. Kesaputta may have been anywhere in this region south of the Moriyas or of the Mallas. We prefer to locate the Kālāmas to the south of the Mallas, below the river Ghāgrā, to the north of the Ganges and northeast of Banaras,<sup>2</sup> as such a location is consistent with Kesaputta's being a Kosalan township. It would place them just on the borders of the other republican communities which seem to have occupied a large territory, bounded on the west by the directly governed part of the Kosalan kingdom.<sup>3</sup> The exact location of the Kālāmas cannot be ascertained, owing to the lack of data.

#### *Status and Government*

The *Āṅguttara Nikāya* and its commentary are the only known sources which allude to the status of the Kālāmas and indicate that they had a republican form of government. The former text says that once the Buddha, while touring amongst the Kālāmas and accompanied by a great body of monks, stayed "at the *nigama* of the Kālāmas, named Kesaputta".<sup>4</sup> In general, *nigama*<sup>5</sup> seems to imply a settlement somewhat smaller than a *nagara* or *pura*,<sup>6</sup> and the use of this term indicates that they were quite a small people, perhaps not much more than a thousand families. In Malalasekera's opinion Kālāma was probably the name of a *gotra* or family.<sup>7</sup> This evidence would show that the region occupied by them was limited to the countryside around their town. As they are placed in the Kosalan country by the text, there is no doubt that they were under the supervision of the Kosalan king, as the Bhaggas were under king Udayana.

<sup>1</sup> *Āṅguttara*, i, p. 188.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *CAGIM*, map xi, pp. 444-5.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. our map A.

<sup>4</sup> *Āṅguttara*, i, p. 188.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *nigama-sabhā*, *Ep. Ind.*, viii, p. 82; xv, p. 263; cf. Majumdar, *Corporate Life*, pp. 144-7.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Mahāvastu*, iii, p. 102; tr., iii, p. 101 fn. 1; cf., I. B. Horner, *The Book of the Discipline*, iv, p. 379, fn. 6.

<sup>7</sup> *DPPN*, i, p. 581.



Raychaudhuri, on the authority of a passage in the *Samyutta Nikāya* where Pasenadi, the king of Kosala, is spoken of as ruling at the head of a group of five *rājās*,<sup>1</sup> suggested that the ruler of the Kālāmas of Kesaputta was one of them.<sup>2</sup> But the difficulty in accepting such a view is very great; neither the *Anguttara Nikāya* nor the commentary refers to a king of the Kālāmas.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, when the Buddha preached at Kesaputta, he referred to the Kālāmas always in the plural, and when he was directly talking to them he addressed them only as Kālāmas. Moreover, the Kālāmas were too small a tribe to be represented on the council of five which Pasenadi headed. We do not know of any such representative body of tribes in the monarchies from our sources, though in the republican confederation of the Vajjians such a principle was followed more or less. Raychaudhuri's claim that such a council existed in Kosala is extremely dubious and we reject it on the grounds that there is no other evidence that representation on a tribal basis was a feature of ancient Indian monarchies. Moreover, even if this was the case in Kosala, the Kālāmas were too insignificant a people to figure in the royal council of five; and finally they had no king as such. The reference cited by Raychaudhuri presumably implies a group of five tributary kings or vassals.

Jayaswal and Bhandarkar have both discussed the question of *nigama*, and the latter has given it a great deal of attention.<sup>4</sup> We do not agree with either in all their views, but agree insofar as the Kālāmas ruled their town through government by discussion. The commentary says that the Kālāmas were Khattiyas.<sup>5</sup> Probably the Kālāma-Khattiya elders formed an assembly which chose a few members who carried out the administration of the town. The process of government should have been fairly simple, probably simpler than the present Indian *tahsīl* town municipalities. There was probably a *santhāgāra* at Kesaputta which was the political, social and religious centre of the *nigama* community, and probably the simple local judicial cases were also tried in this town hall.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Samyutta*, i, p. 155.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. PHAI, p. 99; H. C. Raychaudhuri, *Indian, Culture*, ii, p. 808.

<sup>3</sup> *Anguttara*, i, pp. 188ff; *Man. Pūr.*, i, pp. 418ff.

<sup>4</sup> Jayaswal, *Hindu Polity*, p. 244; Bhandarkar, *Car. Lects.*, pp. 174-8.

<sup>5</sup> *Man. Pūr.*, i, p. 418.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Rhys Davids, *Buddhist India*, p. 20; CHI, i, p. 177.

*Political History*

There are only a few scattered references to the Kālāmas, to their famous philosopher Ālāra, the teacher of the Buddha before the latter attained *Sambodhi*, and to Bharanḍu the Kālāma, once a co-disciple of the Buddha.<sup>1</sup> We do not know if the Kālāmas retained the independence of their *nigama* for long after Pasenadi died.<sup>2</sup> The fact that they did not claim a share in the relics of the Buddha suggests that soon after Viḍūḍabha captured the throne from his father, he annexed the territory of the Kālāmas of Kesaputta to the directly-governed Kosalan kingdom. But it is not improbable that they were indifferent towards Buddhism; if they were in fact connected with the Keśins of the *Brāhmaṇa* literature it is likely that they would be more sympathetic towards Brāhmaṇism. The only early source mentioning the Kālāmas is the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*. Their not being mentioned in the *Jātakas* suggests that they no longer existed as an ethnic *nigama* after the death of Pasenadi.

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<sup>1</sup> *Aṅguttara*, i, pp. 276ff; *Man. Pūr.*, i, pp. 458ff; cf. *DPPN*, i, p. 296; ii, p. 363.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *PHAI*, p. 99; Law, *TAI*, p. 289.



## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### CONCLUSION

In the preceding pages we have traced as far as we can the origin, development, organization, and administration of the republican and quasi-republican institutions in ancient India. Great lacunae and serious uncertainties remain, but the main outlines of the picture may be suggested. Many of the statements below, given in summary form, are themselves hypothetical, and even this outline is largely based on inference.

During the early Vedic period there existed, apart from the limited monarchies, at least four different forms of aristocratic government, and there was a more or less gradual development in these constitutions. The vis, or the archaic assembly, was the earliest democratic institution of Vedic times, and it was responsible for the "choice", rather than the "election", of the head of its political community. The sabhā-ruled states were governed by the most influential men of the tribe who possessed supreme authority within their territory. In this type of aristocracy the sabhā was the only political institution. The sabhā-samiti political communities were more developed and were the most democratic of the Vedic aristocracies. The political communities in which the nobles ruled in conjunction with the samiti appear, in point of time, later than the other three varieties. The nobles seem to have developed from the councillors of the sabhā-ruled communities, and the samiti was primarily a refined and crystallized vis. The nobles-samiti government marked the last stage in the constitutional development of the Vedic aristocracies, and it provided the transitional phase from which developed the Brāhmaṇic monarchies, thus falling into the pattern of already existing monarchies. Monarchies held the stage during the entire later Vedic or Brāhmaṇic period.

It is not unlikely that the northeastern republicans, the Licchavis, Mallas, Sakyas, etc., and probably also the later republics of northwestern India, were offshoots of the early Vedic aristocrats. Their constitutions were an adaptation of those of the latter, some of whom had migrated to the east along the Himālayan foothills, following the tracks of the Videhan national hero.

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There is no evidence for the suggestion that the word *gaṇa* in the Vedic texts denoted a republic, nor is there any weight in the argument that the *vidatha* was the "earliest folk-assembly" of the Indo-Aryans. On the other hand, there is some evidence to show that *gaṇa* meant a collection or troop, and that the *vidatha* was a local synod responsible mainly for the performance of the religious rites and ceremonies of the settlement.

(There is no historical basis for the assumption on the part of most noted historians that the Vajjian Confederacy consisted of eight republican states.) The sources give no support to this generally accepted theory, but indicate that there was no fixed number of confederates, though there was certainly a League of the Licchavis, Mallas, Videhas and Nāyas with its centre at Vesāli. There is no reason to believe in the complicated system of justice attributed to the Vesālians by Buddhaghosa, any more than there is truth in his statement that the Moriyas of Pipphalivana were an offshoot of the Sakyas. Similarly we have shown the weaknesses in the argument of some scholars that the Sakyas were monarchical and under the control of the Kosalan kings during the Buddha's lifetime.

(None of the theories attributing a non-Indian home to the Licchavis is satisfactory, and we have endeavoured to show that they were an Indo-Aryan tribe. That these republican states, with one exception, disappeared soon after the death of the Buddha has also been shown.)

(There is sufficient evidence to show that republicanism did not die out altogether in ancient India after the disappearance of the northeastern republics.) Republican ideas, attitudes, and practices survived until long after the days of the Buddha and Mahāvira. The classical historians refer to a number of northwestern republics during the 4th century B.C., and numerous inscriptions and coins from northwest and western India clearly show that such republics flourished, at least until the date when the Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudra Gupta was engraved. It is probable that the democratic spirit of the early Vedic aristocracies of the northwest did not completely vanish under the monarchies of the Brāhmanic period. This spirit seems to have assumed concrete form again, as soon as the sceptre of strong monarchies wavered. Perhaps those Vedic aristocrats who were not as adventurous and freedom-loving as their northeastern counterparts and did not dare to leave their hearths and homes, but submitted to the rule of a king, later raised

disproves theories



their heads again and set up republican states in the Panjab and Sind region. But (the republics of the Buddhist period, as such, had disappeared for good, with the sole exception of the Licchavis.) They reappeared after about eight hundred years and were to become one of the chief factors in establishing Candragupta I on the throne of Pāṭaliputra. But then, in all probability they had adopted a monarchical constitution.

(‘Did free institutions fail because there was too much monarchy, or was there too much monarchy because free institutions had failed?’ This is the question asked by Larsen in connection with the fall of the Greek and Roman republics. In his opinion, Roman history to a considerable extent favours the latter suggestion.<sup>1</sup> However, our study of Indian history does not provide a straight answer to this question. For about 500 years of the early Vedic period republican institutions and monarchies flourished side by side. (There is no evidence to show that monarchies defeated the aristocracies in that period,) though there is ground for the view that the nobles-*samiti* aristocracy would tend to give rise to monarchy because an individual noble could acquire highest power and prestige within the college of rulers.)

(The emphasis on the person of the king and the divinity attributed to him in the *Brāhmaṇa* texts manifest the preference of the age for strong individual rulers.) The concept of *varṇāśrama* and the king’s supreme duty to preserve this *dharma* was gaining ground, and reveals the spirit of the times. In fact the entire Vedic literature is so full of respect for the *rājās* that a non-specialist would hardly believe that there were any republics in the Vedic period. The ṛṣi-composers of the texts designated the gods as *rājās* and *sam-rāts*, perhaps with the view to enhancing the peoples’ reverence for their earthly rulers. (The Brāhmaṇic writers are unanimously ill-disposed towards the republicans, and the Licchavis, Sakyas, Mallas, etc., are never even mentioned in their voluminous texts. This would tend to show that at least during the Brāhmaṇic period republican institutions failed because there was “too much monarchy”.)

(There is yet another interpretation, which we prefer, that not all the republicans submitted to the change, but that some of them moved eastwards in order to preserve their political system) This

<sup>1</sup> Larsen, *op. cit.*, p. 161.



manifests itself in the republican institutions that flourished during the Buddhist period. At the same time, it is not unreasonable to suggest that some of the tribes of the old school, though they submitted to the monarchies of the Brāhmaṇic period, reverted back to their original constitutions as soon as the monarchies in power wavered in the post-Vedic period. This would explain the background of the republican peoples who are mentioned by the classical historians. (Alexander's historians mention more republican than monarchical governments in the northwest during the 4th century B.C. Later inscriptional and numismatic evidence further attests to the existence of republican communities at least up to 385 A.D. (the date of the Allahabad Pillar Inscription). From this comes the evident fact that both republics and monarchies existed simultaneously.)

(In the northeast of India also the republicans occupied a vast area between the Himālayas in the north, the Ganges and the Magadhan kingdom in the south, Kāśi-Kosala in the west, and in the east as far as the Aryan civilization had penetrated.) There was indeed pressure from kings such as Ajātasattu of Magadha and Viḍūḍabha of Kosala, but it is doubtful that the republics fell solely because of the aggressive actions of these ambitious kings. The mighty army of Magadha could not subdue the Vajjian Confederacy by the sheer force of their arms, even in a decade, but had also to resort to diplomacy, to sowing seeds of dissension. Through their clever, deceitful and unscrupulous politician Vassakāra, who did not hesitate to employ the meanest tricks, the Magadhans achieved the downfall of the powerful League which could not be defeated in the battlefield. (The success of Vassakāra is evidence, not so much of the triumph of ministerial diplomacy, but rather as a sad commentary on the inherent weaknesses of the republican system.)

The Sakyas and Koliyas also did not fall easy prey to the ruthless Viḍūḍabha, and it is certain that it took the Kosalan king several years before he almost completely destroyed the republic which had given India one of her noblest sons.

(The inherent weaknesses of republicanism, clearly noticed by Kauṭilya and the compilers of the *Mahābhārata*, were also chief factors leading to the downfall of the republics.) Perhaps an even more important factor in their downfall than the aggression of the monarchies, was (the discord among the administrators of the republics themselves.) Thus, their disappearance may be primarily



attributed to the discord and disharmony among the republicans, and the comparatively lengthy process of decision-making and putting it into effect. The imperialist actions of monarchies may be viewed as a secondary cause. ↘

(Another significant point which has impressed us very strongly in this connection, is that most of the states of antiquity which evolved republican institutions appear to have inhabited unfavourable geographical terrain) e.g., hilly regions, marshy lands, forests, etc. Athens was built on a hill, Rome was founded on seven hills, the Sakyas, Licchavis, Mallas, etc., all inhabited comparatively difficult regions. So did the Yaudheyas, Mālavas and Kṣūdrakas of the northwest of India. Among the German tribal republics the Chattis had their settlement in a forested, hilly region, and the case was similar with the Chaudi and Suebi Confederacy which occupied the marshy, forested and hilly Suebian land. (It seems that their difficult geographical location and harsh climate inspired in all these peoples a martial zeal and democratic spirit unsurpassed by that of the docile subjects of monarchies.)

(While their geographical location and climate made them more adventurous and better fighting men, it also inculcated in the republican citizens and leaders a false pride in their individual importance which could be exploited against their own interests as was most certainly the case with the Vajjians.) Each member of the assembly was called a *rājā*, but none had the individual power to mould the decisions of the assembly. It is probable that some councillors or leaders of the republic either wished to rise above the rest and become virtual rulers, as was the case in the nobles-*samiti* aristocracies of the Vedic period, or that some preferred to betray the republic for their selfish interests, thus becoming lieutenants of a king. The latter could offer these betrayers substantial rewards either in the form of material gains or by entrusting them with important state offices,<sup>1</sup> which they could not expect while the republic continued and prospered. Personal ambition and party politics will also be remembered for the part they played in the downfall of the Roman and Athenian republics.

(In addition, most of the republics in the ancient world, and particularly the Indian republics, had a clan origin and clan loyalty.)

<sup>1</sup> E.g. Bandhula. Cf. above, pp. 179ff.



There were occasional feuds amongst the republics themselves; though they were of minor importance they nonetheless weakened the republican position. To this we would attribute the fall of the Sakyas and Koliyas. If, on the other hand, all the republics of the time could have mustered their forces together against Magadha or Kosala, the monarchies would have had no chance to get the better of the republican federation.

(The area covered by each republic was comparatively small, and in those more difficult times geography led to isolation, as means of communication were rare and bad. The trend of the time was towards stronger monarchies.) The Magadhan kingdom was expanding at the cost of its neighbours, and Aṅga had already been annexed. Similar was the case with Kosala, which had gained control over Kāśī, though about 200 years earlier the growth of the republican states had been at the cost of monarchies. (Circumstances in northeastern India were not favourable for the prosperity of republicanism after the time of the Buddha, though this by no means implies that the Buddha's presence was the cause of republican prosperity.)

We have brought to a close our study of the Vedic aristocracies and the Buddhist republics. In both constitutions we may notice the application of the same principles; both believed in the "unwisdom of the multitude,"<sup>1</sup> in the justice and necessity of limiting privileges to comparatively few, and in letting them rule the rest of the population as subjects excluded from the rights of citizenship. Both had the same scheme of government in which the mean was struck between the single dominion of a tyrant and the sovereignty of a large assembly, by the creation of a council, where a few able men, acting in concert, were to direct the policy and administer the state.

At this point we must conclude our study of republican institutions in the India of the *Vedas* and the Buddha. We hope our efforts have been successful in presenting a clear historical survey which reveals some new facts relevant to this often vague and misunderstood topic. Our work has entailed a thorough re-examination and reinterpretation of the relevant texts. Yet often the ancient works have failed us and it has been necessary to formulate

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<sup>1</sup> Whibley, *op. cit.*, p. 187.



hypotheses in order to fill in the gaps and to present a more coherent study of these ancient republican institutions. With time, perhaps, these gaps may also be filled in by solid additions to the range of our historical knowledge of Ancient India.

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A

#### BUDDHAGHOSA'S ETYMOLOGIES OF LICCHAVI AND VAJJI

##### I. *Passage from the Paramattha-Jotikā*, i, p. 159.

Atha tato addamāsaccayena ekā maṁsapesi suvaṇṇabimbasa-  
diso dārako, ekā dārikā ahosi. Tesu tāpasassa puttasineho uppajji  
aṅguṭṭhakato c' assa khīraṁ nibbatti. Tato pabhuti ca khīrabhat-  
taṁ labhi; so bhattaṁ bhuñjitvā khīraṁ dārkānaṁ mukhe āsiṅcati.  
Tesaṁ yaṁ yaṁ udaraṁ pavisati, taṁ sabbam maṇibhājanagataṁ  
viya sandissati, evaṁ nicchavī ahesuṁ; apare āhu: 'Sibbetvā  
ṭhapitā viya nesaṁ aññaṁaññaṁ līnā chavi ahosi'; evaṁ te niccha-  
vitāya vā linacchavitāya vā Licchavī ti paññāyimsu.

##### II. *Passage from the Paramattha-Jotikā*, i, p. 160.

Dārakā vuddhim anvāya kilantā vivādaṭṭhānesu aññe gopāla-  
dārake hatthena pi pādena pi paharanti. Te rodanti, 'kissa rodathā'  
ti mātāpitūhi ca 'ime nimmātāpitikā tāpasapositā amhe atīva paha-  
ranti' ti vadanti. Tato tesam mātāpitāro 'ime dārakā aññe dārake  
vināsentī dukkhāpentī, na ime saṅgahetabbā vajjitabbā ime vajji-  
tabbā ime' ti āhaṁsu. Tato pabhuti kira so padeso Vajjī ti vuccati  
tiyojanasataṁ parimāṇena.



## APPENDIX B

### LINGUISTIC ASPECT OF OUR ETYMOLOGY OF LICCHAVI

The changing of 'l' into 'r' is a regular feature of the Eastern dialects of the Indo-European family. Professor T. Burrow makes the following observation on this point:

"In Iranian Indo-European r and l appear indiscriminately as r.<sup>1</sup> In the language of the *Ṛg Veda* this is predominantly the case. In Classical Sanskrit both l and r are found, but their distribution does not correspond exactly with that of Indo-European. In certain Eastern dialects of Indo-Aryan (notably in the inscriptions of Aśoka and in the *Māgadhi* of the Drama) only l is found."<sup>2</sup>

This gives us grammatical support for our suggestion that *Ṛkṣavin* was the original name, formed from *ṛkṣa*. By changing an 'in' ending into a lengthened vowel in the nominative singular, we get *Ṛkṣavi* (meaning "people of the bear-abounding region") from *Ṛkṣavin*. In the Pāli canon, the *Arthaśāstra*, the *Mānavadharmasāstra* and the Gupta Inscriptions it is represented as *Licchavi*, by the substitution of 'Li' for 'Ṛ', and 'ccha' for 'kṣa', according to the regular rules of Eastern Prākṛit, but retaining the ending of the nominative singular.

Ṛkṣa vi from Ṛkṣa vin

Ṛ — Kṣa — Vi =

Li — Ccha — Vi

Thus *Ṛkṣavin* would be the original Sanskrit form of Licchavi.

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<sup>1</sup> T. Burrow, *The Sanskrit Language*, p. 82 fn. 1, with a few exceptions though.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

# APPENDIX C

## RELATIVE OCCURRENCES OF THE TERMS VAJJI AND LICCHAVI IN THE MAHĀPARINIRVĀṆA SŪTRA

<i>Waldschmidt page</i>	<i>Sanskrit Text</i>		<i>Pāli Text</i>	
	<i>Vṛji</i>	<i>Licchavi</i>	<i>Vajji</i>	<i>Licchavi</i>
102	2	—	5	—
104	2	—	5	—
106	7	—	9	—
108	8	—	9	—
110	13	—	11	—
112	15	—	9	—
114	15	—	15	—
116	6	—	6	—
118	1	—	2	—
146	2	—	2	—
148	—	—	1	—
162	1	—	—	—
172	1	—	—	—
178	1	1	4	4
180	—	2	—	6
182	—	1	—	2
184	—	2	—	2
186	—	1	—	2
190	1	—	—	—
192	2	—	—	—
202	1	—	—	—
204	2	—	—	—
228	1	—	—	—
230	1	—	—	—
434	—	1	—	1
436	—	2	—	—
440	—	1	—	—
444	—	1	—	—
446	—	2	—	1
Total:	82	14	78	18



## APPENDIX D

### BUDDHAGHOSA ON THE VAJJIAN PROCEDURE OF JUSTICE, IN THE SUMAṄGALA VILĀSINĪ, ii, p. 519.

Porāṇaṃ Vajji-dhammaṃ ti ettha pubbe kira Vajji-rājāno: Ayaṃ coro ti, ānetvā dassite: 'Gaṇhatha taṃ coraṃ' ti avatvā *vinicchaya-mahāmattānaṃ*<sup>1</sup> denti. Te vinicchinitvā sace acoro hoti vissajjenti; sace coro hoti attanā kiñci avatvā<sup>2</sup> *vohārī-kānaṃ* denti. Te pi vinicchinitvā acoro ce, vissajjenti, coro ce, *suttadharā*<sup>3</sup> nāma honti tesam denti. Te pi vinicchinitvā, acoro ce, vissajjenti, coro ca, *aṭṭhakulikānaṃ*<sup>4</sup> denti. Te pi tath'eva katvā *senāpatissa*, senāpati *uparājassa*, uparājā *rañño* rājā vinicchinitvā, acoro ce, vissajjenti, sace pana coro hoti *paveṇī-potthakaṃ* vācāpeti. Tattha yena idaṃ nāma kataṃ tassa ayaṃ nāma daṇḍo ti, likhitaṃ, rājā tassa kiriyaṃ tena samānetvā tadanucchavikaṃ daṇḍaṃ karoti. Iti evaṃ porāṇaṃ Vajji-dhammaṃ samādāya vattantaṃ manussā na ujjhāyanti, rājāno porāṇaka-paveṇiyā dhammaṃ<sup>5</sup> karonti. Etesaṃ doso n'atthi amhākaṃ yeva doso ti, appamattā kammante karonti. Evaṃ rājūnaṃ vuddhi hoti. Yena vuttaṃ vuddhi yeva Ānanda Vajjīnaṃ pātikaṅkhā no parihānī ti.

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<sup>1</sup> Our underlining to mark the eight stages of procedure.

<sup>2</sup> SS. akatvā.

<sup>3</sup> B. antokārikā.

<sup>4</sup> SS. kulakānaṃ.

<sup>5</sup> SS. omit; B kammaṃ.

APPENDIX E  
THE BRĀHMAṆAS OF DROṆAGRĀMA

As regards these Brāhmaṇas, the Sanskrit version of the *Mahā-parinirvāṇa Sūtra* seems to give more reliable, though confused, information which, if analyzed, gives accurate knowledge about the Brāhmaṇas who also claimed a share in the relics of the Buddha. The Pāli version tells that a single Brāhmaṇa also claimed a share, saying "The Exalted One was a Kṣatriya, and I am a Brāhmaṇa. I am worthy to receive a portion of the relics of the Exalted One."<sup>1</sup> The corresponding Sanskrit passage has *Viṣṇudvīpivakā brāhmaṇā*<sup>2</sup> in the plural, and the same phrase is repeated in a later passage<sup>3</sup> which does not correspond to the Pāli, though it occurs in both the Tibetan and the Chinese versions. The following page of the Sanskrit version and its corresponding Tibetan and Chinese versions have, *Dhūmrāsagotro brāhmaṇaḥ*, whereas the Pāli version has only *Doṇo brāhmaṇo*<sup>4</sup> who proposes to divide the remains of the Buddha into eight portions in order to avoid a quarrel among the claimants. He then asks them to give him a portion over which they would build a *stūpa* in Droṇagrāma<sup>5</sup> and duly honour it. The succeeding passage of the Sanskrit version refers to the *Dhūmrāsagotro brāhmaṇo* and *Viṣṇudvīpivakā brāhmaṇā* and has no corresponding Pāli text. However, in the next passage we have again the expression *Vayaṁ Droṇagrāmake*, which is followed by *Dhūmrāsagotrasya brāhmaṇasya*,<sup>6</sup> also occurring in the ensuing sentence.<sup>7</sup> But the Pāli version has only *Doṇo brāhmaṇo*. In the Sanskrit version it is the *Dhūmrāsagotro brāhmaṇa* who, as the representative of the other Brāhmaṇas, addresses the Mallian *gaṇa*. When the distribution takes place, a portion goes to the Brāhmaṇas of Viṣṇudvīpa, in all the versions,<sup>8</sup> though the Pāli version accredits it to a single Brāhmaṇa. Yet the next page contains a significant statement in

<sup>1</sup> *Dīgha*, ii, p. 165.

<sup>2</sup> *MPS*, p. 434.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 440.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 442.

<sup>5</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 444.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 446.

<sup>8</sup> *Loc. cit.*



the Sanskrit version, which does not have a Pāli counterpart, that “the Brāhmaṇas of Dhūmrāsagotra erected a *stūpa* in Droṇagrāma”.<sup>1</sup>

The evidence discussed above shows the confusion that exists in both the Pāli and the Sanskrit versions. The Pāli version uses the expression *Doṇa Brāhmaṇa* throughout, which might indicate that for the Pāli writer Doṇa (Sanskrit Droṇa) is the proper name of a single Brāhmaṇa who comes from Veṭhadīpa (Sanskrit Viṣṇudvīpa). The Sanskrit version not only refers to the Brāhmaṇa as coming from Viṣṇudvīpa, but also tells that he is of the Dhūmra *gotra*, and gives what appears to be the alternative name of Viṣṇudvīpa, i.e., Droṇagrāma. We believe that both the versions are confusing, but the Sanskrit version gives certain significant details forgotten by the Pāli—that the Brāhmaṇa was of the Dhūmra *gotra* and came from a Brāhmaṇa settlement of Droṇagrāma. When the Pāli version refers to him as *Doṇa brāhmaṇa* it in fact does not refer to his proper name but implies a place-name equivalent to the Sanskrit Droṇaka or Droṇagrāmaka, one hailing from Droṇagrāma, like the Kauśīnāraka or Vaiśālīka.

Thus, the *Dhūmrāsagotra* Brāhmaṇa whose proper name is not mentioned, came from Droṇagrāma, which was a settlement of *Dhūmrāsagotra* Brāhmaṇas, just as the messenger of the Bulis came from Allakappa, and that of the Licchavis from Vesālī, etc. The Pāli version errs in referring to him by his proper name and in implying that he claimed a share of the relics on his own behalf. Apart from Vassakāra, the envoy of Ajātasattu, no proper names of envoys are mentioned.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 448.

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